はけんのこうき
アルティーナ
ALTINA
the Sword Princess
アルティーナ
覇剣の皇姫
IV
Yukiya Murasaki
むらさきゆきや
ill. himesuz
ファミ通文庫

覇剣の皇姫
アルティーナ
Ⅳ
ALTINA
the Sword Princess

大剣使いの第四皇女
アルティーナ

「レジス、あなたは、
どう考えてるの？」

読書狂の軍師
レジス

「……僕は、今夜、終わらせる
べきだと提案します」

「ククク……要塞を
出るわけか」

追放された英雄
ジェローム

ハイブリタニア第一王女
マーガレット

「死刑がいいわぁ」

「善処いたしますな」

ハイブリタニアの軍師
オズワルド

ベルガリア帝国第三皇子
バスティアン

「こいつは、俺の書いている物語だ！」

「下手な字なのです」

ハイブリタニア貴族の少女
エリーゼ

「たった一人で、エリザベス王女を護りながら……
〝よくぞ、ここまで〟と讃えるべきで
ございましょうね」

「俺たちとしては……
お前に勝って、マーガレット王女に
約束を守ってもらうしかないってわけだ」

オズワルドは穏やかだった。
こいつは、ただ弁舌が立つだけではないな、
と対峙してみて、バスティアンは気を引き締める。

ALTINA
the Sword Princess

I trust you" Altina and The
bibliophagic boy face
difficulties
ogether.

人物紹介
Characters

マリー・カトル・アルジェンティーナ・ドゥ・ベルガリア

ベルガリア帝国第四皇姫。母の故郷アルジェンティーナ（愛称アルティーナ）にちなんで名付けられた。赤髪紅瞳の持ち主で、身の丈以上の大剣〈帝身轟雷ノ四〉を振り回す。帝国の圧政に苦しむ民のため皇帝になるべく立ち上がった。

レジス・オーリック

五等文官。読書狂で、軍の司書になるのが夢だった。士官学校時代は弓や剣はおろか乗馬もろくにできない落ちこぼれだったが、豊富な読書量に裏打ちされた軍略の才能は確か。

クラリス

アルティーナが物心ついたときから一緒にいる２歳年上のメイドで、心から信頼されている。普段は人形のように無口だが、気に入った人には冗談ばかり言う変わり者。

ジェローム・ジャン・ドゥ・バイルシュミット

名高い猛将だったが、戦功を妬まれて辺境に追いやられた。それ以来、昼間から酒を飲み、博打にかまける自堕落ぶりだったが、アルティーナとの決闘に敗れ、潔く部下となった。

カルロス・リアン・オーギュスト・ドゥ・ベルガリア

帝国第一皇子。第一皇位継承権を持つも、生まれつき病弱で、吐血し倒れてからしばらく大衆の前から姿を消していたが、今では公務に復帰している。

エディ・ファビオ・ドゥ・バルザック

一等武官。剣の名家バルザック家の新当主で、その剣さばきは確かだが戦場で人を斬ったことはない。携えている長剣は初代皇帝から賜り代々受け継がれた〈護帝護国ノ七〉

エリック・ミカエル・ドゥ・ブランシャール

ベルガリア帝国騎士でエヴラールの孫。かつてレジスが所属していたテネゼ侯爵軍で、レジスの采配に感銘を受け、尊敬する彼の後を追うため、あえて前線への配属を志願した。

ハインリヒ・トロワ・バスティアン・ドゥ・ベルガリア

帝国第三皇子。継承権争いに巻き込まれることを嫌って、ハイブリタニアに留学している。他の兄妹たちが宝剣を与えられたことを羨み〈帝足音切ノ参〉を黙って持ち出した。

エリザベス・ヴィクトリア

ハイブリタニア王家の人間だが、身分を偽り、一般的な貴族の子として学校に通っている。非常に利発で平和主義者ゆえに周りから尊敬され、優等生に与えられる称号を授かっている。

ALTINA

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illust.himesuz

the Sword Princess

MER

ゲルマニア連邦

ヴォルクス要塞

ヴァーデン大公国

15Li

シエルク砦

8Li

100Li

テュオンヴェル

帝都ヴェルセイユ

王城クイーンズタワー

100ml

アップルウッド

グレイブリッジ

ベルガリア帝国

Prologue

Prologue 1 - The Thunder Closing In

Belgaria, Empire year 851

On an early morning of the end of April.

It was still chilly in the northern region.

It had been snowing since last night which only to melt when dawn came.

Because of that, the fortress walls were completely wet.

In one corner of the fortress was the room of the Strategist, Regis Auric.

A small ray of light woke the owner of the room up.

He fell asleep reading on the bed last night.

He had unconsciously put his book aside.

“Hnnn…… Eh…… Is it morning already?”

He got out the bed after parting with his thin blanket, hugging his shoulders as it was too cold.

Regis went across the pile of documents and head towards his desk.

On top of the documents was an oil lamp.

His hand searched in the darkness for the tinderbox.

A few days ago, during his birthday on April 23, Regis received an scarlet box, which was kept in a drawer.

He then took out a flint and spill.

Following that, he opened the tinderbox and pressed down the dented metal plate.

Sparks were created as the fire striker hit the flint.

Spread before the dent, small flames appeared as the charcoal was lighted up.

Regis used the spill to transfer the swaying flames. To prevent the fire from being extinguished, he moved it towards the lamp carefully.

Regis quickly put the oil lamp’s glass cover back after the room was illuminated.

As the Volk Fortress made use of the tunnel, only the bare minimum of light could enter, which was insufficient for paperwork.

Even if it was during the day, lamp was still used.

Moreover, for days that were colder, there was a need to use the heater……

Even firewood was valuable commodity.

It was cold enough to even see his own breath, but not enough to freeze his hand. Regis extinguished the burning spill by pressing it on a metal tray.

The lighted charcoal was put out as the tinderbox was closed. The flint was also kept back into the drawer.

Regis took off his nightwear and reached for his military uniform which was hanging on the wall.

Regis was already used to the Beilschmidt Border Regiment uniform.

Although it was troublesome that there were a lot of buttons, it was effective against cold.

The bars on his shoulders were the same as before.

When Regis was in the capital, he was informed by the commander-in-chief, Latreille, that he would be promoted to 3rd grade admin officer.

As he has yet to receive the order, he was still a 5th grade admin officer——

Was the promotion cancelled?

A follow-up of this topic, when faced with the pursuit by the First Army, Knights of the White Wolves, Regis used the fire strategy on them and reduced their number more than half.

If I'm Latreille, I will also find it hard to grant the promotion.

Although it was a pity that he could not get promoted, but… his achievement was exaggerated. In fact, Regis felt that it was a miracle that he was not fired.

It was because he have low-esteem, reasons being that his swordsmanship was inferior to even a child, unable to use a bow and could not even ride a horse.

As a soldier, he was more useless than an old man carrying luggage.

After changing, Regis seemed to notice something on the table.

"Huh?"

On the table was a new document——

It was a report about the internal strife in the regiment.

The unit that Regis currently served in was officially called the Beilschmidt Border Regiment

The commander was Altina—— The 4th princess, Marie Quatre Argentina de Belgaria.

Was now known as Marie Quatre Army.

Although Altina's swordsmanship was recognized, she was still a 14 year old girl.

Even if she would be 15 in May, she was still a child now.

Jerome Jean de Beilschmidt was fully responsible for the combat unit.

He was hailed as a hero and a knight, the type that would charge in front in the battlefield.

However, the two of them did not care about the details.

Some say that great men would not trifle over the small details or they might just be crude and careless…

A large part of the imperial regular army was trained since young, but that does not matter.

However, the Marie Quatre Army had recruited many new people.

Ranging from the soldiers in the fort before the siege, to mercenaries from afar.

There was also leaders joining with their own men.

Because of that, the regular and the new soldiers would often argue.

No matter when, difference in culture would lead to clashes.

Soldiers were not horses, when the population increase, disputes would also increase.

To resolve their dissatisfaction, there was a need to solve each cases with care.

However, Regis did not have that time to do so due to the severe lack of admin officer.

All by himself, he settled the organisation of the units and the division of supplies, as well as the preliminary arrangement of the expected strategies.

Hence, Regis found an assistant.

The name of the person who wrote the report was found on one of the documents..

“So it’s Lilim.”

“Yes, I’m here.”

The voice came from the pile of documents.

Regis retreated a few steps back as he was caught off-guard by the voice.

“Awawa!?”

“Pardon me.”

Suddenly, a black-haired, brown-skinned maid appeared.

Although young, Lilim was already the head of maid under prince Auguste.

Originally, she had nothing to do on the Beilschmidt border regiment but, because of her valuable mediation sense, Regis entrusted her to solve the disputes inside the forces.

Lilim stood among the pile of documents after patting the dust off her clothes.

“My apology, this morning when I’m delivering the document, you were still resting.”

“A-ah…… In that case, isn’t it fine if you just put it on the table?”

“Yes, that was what I intended to do, but…”

“But?”

“I got drowsy after seeing you sleeping.”

It seems like a reason, at the same time, doesn’t seems like a reason.

However, there’s no doubt that she have been helping out recently.

Be it reviewing documents, sorting the problems and even mediation was done properly.

“…… Is that so? Thanks.”

“Finishing work is the best joy one can attain!”

Lilim said it with a smile.

Suddenly, the door opened.

“Sir Regis, have you woke up?”

“Aahh.”

The one who entered the room was the young knight, Eric Michael de Blanchard.

Although he was just 16 year old, but in Belgaria, 15 was considered an adult, hence he was already an outstanding knight.

Beautiful golden hair and refreshing emerald eyes, together with a voice that sounds as clear as a girl.

When his father died, in order to protect his family, he had to inherited his family name as he have no siblings.

Compared to those, there were far more important things.

“Good morning, Reg——”

Eric who just entered was stunned, just like a statue.

To this point, Regis’ face began to redden.

“Ah, that…… It’s not what you think.”

“Just what is going on! Sir Regis, why are you taking off your pants in front of a child!”

“It’s a misunderstanding, Eric, please calm down.”

“Her Highness and Ms Clarisse aside, how could you do this to a child!”

“Eh?”

Lilim tilted her head

* * *

“Ahahahahaah!”

Morning, Volk Fortress, officer’s dining room——

Altina was hugging her stomach, laughing loudly

Regis’ shoulders drooped.

“…… It’s not funny at all…… I almost died there, socially that is.”

“I-I’m very sorry!”

Eric had a guilty face.

In the canteen were Regis, Altina, Eric and Clarisse sitting together.

Lilim went to Auguste—— Felicia’s room to serve breakfast to Felicia.

Incidentally, on Felicia’s request, her bodyguard, Eddie Fabio de Balzac, was living in the same room as her.

Although the parties involved denied it, it was clear that they were in a relationship, which was not a problem anyway.

To the soldiers, both the prince and the duke were males, hence there should not be any problem…

Altina could not stop laughing after hearing the unwarranted misunderstanding.

“Ahahaa… My stomach, hurts…… Ahaha… ha. However, it’s good that you don’t have those kind of interests.”

“That’s obvious.”

“In that case, tell me about what you look for in girls.”

“…… R-rather than this kind of question, we should be considering the issues that have piled up. Even if it’s breakfast now, we cannot waste time.”

“Tch…”

Altina clicked her tongue, Regis disregarded it and continued talking

“…In that case… you should had heard it… Last night, the news about the death of High Britannia queen have reached us.”

Yes.”

Altina straighten her posture.

“… The urgent message came on 25th, the death occurred on 15th.”

In other words, on the first day of the founding anniversary, the neighbouring queen had died.

This was an age where messages need some time to travel when something important happened.

When they discovered enemies, they would use smokes signals or sound to convey the message.

Other than that, news were usually written down and delivered on horses.

If the situation permits, they could change horses at relay stations in order to speed up the delivery, but it would be tough for the frontline.

The distance between the town Tuonvell and Volk fortress was about 23Li(100km). There was no relay station along the way as they have to go past the forest in which the barbarians reside.

Altina and the barbarian king, Diethart had a secret agreement, hence it was safe for Belgaria's soldiers…… Just that the alliance with the barbarian has yet to be publicised.

The messengers would advanced cautiously in the forest, hence it would take a long time to deliver.

Even so, delivery of report have it own pros. For example, there was little need to worry about spies.

Even if there were spies, people that leave their regiment or base would be very conspicuous.

In the army, there would definitely be one or two spies—— With this in mind, they cannot even let down their guard even during training. It was the same for spies that escaped or those who continued to mix in the army. In addition, there were other more difficult reasons.

If in the future, there was an invention that do not requires manpower, the situation would be different.

Regis continued on the topic.

"High Britannia is a country that is ruled by a queen, the parliament runs the country. According to their tradition, once a week past after the death of their queen, mourning will end and the next queen will be crowned."

"Parliament?"

Altina asked.

"It's similar to Belgaria's nobles, just that they hold more power. For example, no matter what the queen ordered, if 24 out of 30 members objected, that order will not be carry out."

"Hey~ aren't they powerful!"

"… Yes, it's something like a safety device to prevent tyrants. Under normal situation, the final decision lies on the queen on which policies to use."

"Ahhh, I see. I still feel that it's an interesting system."

"The new queen is usually elected by the previous queen, recognised by the parliament…… Just that the death of the queen isn't sudden, but died on her sickbed……The new queen has probably been chosen."

"In that case, what is the important part of that?"

"If there the successor is chosen, I believe their current stance will not change. On the other hand, if it was an assassination…"

"Ah, I see."

Altina nodded, even if she was not well-verse in politics, she was not a fool.

“Latreille who is in the capital should also be thinking about this. In particular, High Britannia did not increase their military. Well, looks like the second army was already sent…… At least, we did not receive any commands.”

“I see… Regis, what is your view on this?”

“… Isn’t it a little inappropriate? Their ruler just died not too long and if they sent their army out, it will result in unnecessary dissatisfaction. Unless we are looking for a fight, right now we should avoid a war with High Britannia.”

“It seems that the kingdom got hold of some amazing technology recently.”

“…… Ahh, the steam-engine technology. Railways and steam-powered ships shorten the time for the delivery of goods by a lot. When it is faster, human, goods and news will also take lesser time to travel…… If in the future there is a technology that enables long distance communication, there’s no doubt the live of the people will change dramatically.”

“Long distance communication?”

“Can’t even imagine it, right?”

“With a super loud voice?”

“…… That, I think it’s a little different from that?”

“However, if they have some amazing technology, they should be attacking us, no?”

“Well… Are there any countries that wish to wage war with Belgaria?”

“That doesn't matter, people from the army want to try their power if they have it, and people with authority uses their influence as they want.”

“I see.”

Regis did not have a strong feeling on this, as it was not rare for a country that was more superior to wage a war.

Suddenly, Regis remembered something that bothered him once.

“… Altina… The you right now have more military strength than before. If it increase even more, will you fight Latreille?”

Altina thought for awhile, her expression was serious unlike the usual.

“…… If the people support this war.”

“That’s just like you.”

She have grown, Regis thought. Her past failures resulted in her to consider more.

If Regis wanted to make things difficult for her, questions like ‘what if half of population support it?’ could be asked.

For now, it was fine if Regis was the only one thinking about it, the ruler do not need to be omnipotent.

“Then, we won’t be doing anything other than just looking at them?”

"… Yes…… War funds aren't unlimited."

The war preparation, such as increasing the food reserves and increasing the number of active soldiers, would requires a large sum.

If the war funds was to be used up, what would they do if there was a war next year? When that happens, they would be in a difficult position.

The commanders were usually forced into a decision.

Altina frowned.

"In addition, High Britannia is opposite of the west coast, while this fortress is situated in northeast region. Moreover, the army are not in standby, hence war preparation is necessary, otherwise, it's not possible."

"… Ahh, so it's impossible."

Precisely of that, they should focus on the border instead—— This thought was possible, but the current situation made it impossible to strengthen their equipments.

Touching on this topic made Altina to remember other things.

"Talking about High Britannia, I wonder if Bastian is fine. He is energetic in nature, I hope nothing happens to him."

"The 3rd prince Bastian? He seems to be studying in High Britannia right now."

"He escaped because he doesn't want to be involved in the political struggle. It's so like him, I wonder if he's free-spirited or just weird."

"… I investigated him a little… but… is that really true?"

"Could it be a lie?"

"I'm not sure…… But there are numerous rumours about prince Bastian. Leaving the second prince Latreille who control the military, his reputation is even lower than the bedridden first prince Auguste."

"Ahh, yes. He brought a lot of troubles for others."

"No matter what, the support for the candidates with the rights to the throne is indisputable. "

"In that case, you can also see it as avoiding troubles instead. Every time after getting into trouble, his mother or some relatives would need to go and apologize."

If the prince caused problems in the neighbouring country, that would be disastrous… There was no helping it if that happens.

Regis remembered a certain story.

"… I heard that he fought with a mercenary group in a certain tavern at the capital, but the reason why he was in the tavern was unknown, so is the reason for the fight."

The information Regis got from the tavern's staff was unclear, however the part about prince Bastian lacking in self-respect was clear.

Altina nodded her head.

“He was ordered to be prudent by Father himself last year.”

“…… Ordered by the emperor?"

“Bastian said ‘I went and took a look because it seems interesting, then I realised a waiter was harassed by a drunkard, so I went to help.”

“…… Help, is it?”

“Yes, he also said something like ‘I only realise that my right hand hurts after punching out. I am justice’.”

“…… He justified going to the tavern just because it’s interesting, how annoying.”

“Now that you said it, you’re right.”

“He can’t claim he is right just because of his status and identity. Looks like his point of view is limited.”

“Yup, yup. No matter how angry he was, to actually start a fight in the tavern. Looks like Bastian did not consider anything at all.”

“…… A few days ago, you raised your sword against the 2nd prince.”

“Argh……”

“Considering that the sister’s personality is like this, I’m not surprised that her brother is like this too.”

“Uuu…… Ah, I’m not as violent as Bastian… Probably.”

Altina seemed to be resisting this.

Eric raised his hand.

“I’m sorry…… Regarding commander Latreille, is there nothing to discuss about him?”

“Discuss about?”

“A few days ago, we fought the first army. About that, won’t we be accused of treason?”

“Ahh……”

It was understandable as to why the soldiers were worried about this.

Though it was unfounded for Regis.

“…… To convict us in the military court, they have to prove that the Knights of the White Wolves are acting righteously first. The clash between the two orders… Who do you think is the one in the wrong?”

“That’s right.”

“It’s them. The reason why they invited prince Auguste back to the capital is to reveal his true identity and render the recommendation void.”

Eric nodded.

Altina was listening seriously.

"…… So, what authority does Latreille has to order prince Auguste who gave up his inheritance rights and who is not even a soldier?"

" "Ah""

Altina and Eric nodded their head in agreement.

In the first place, the action of the Knights of the White Wolves were stepping out of their line.

Latreille was from royalty, so it was hard to read him, maybe he was thinking as a general when he gave the order to the 1st army.

"…… Well, we have yet to think up a countermeasure if Altina receive an order to return to the capital."

"What should I do if that happens?"

"If that happens, it's likely that he ordered it as a general. In that case, it is necessary to bring along your unit and return to Volk Fortress for preparation."

"What if I was told to go just like this or alone?"

"…… If he is that desperate to do that, you can relax in a certain sense…… Although there's hierarchy in the military, if he did something to you who went empty handed, it will be like him announcing to the nation that he will assassinate his sister."

"I see. How despicable."

"…… The order to attack Volk Fortress is the same, if you were to die in battle, it will be a bad deal. The commander that send his soldiers to death while afraid to die…… It's the same as announcing he will assassinate his sister. This kind of fallen prince…… How many nobles do you think will support him?"

"If I'm his opponent, I should collude with the nobles first?"

"Yes, the nobles only support Latreille because they think he will become the next emperor. Do you think the emperor will choose him if he did such a disgraceful act?"

"Ah, that's right! Father respect the founding emperor ,L'Empereur Flamme. It's not strange if he revoke Latreille's inheritance rights."

In the end, this political struggle was to let the emperor choose them as the next ruler.

Ignoring criticism and not knowing shame, using his own authority and power to harm his own sister, only someone who was inhuman would do that. Even Latreille understood this.

If Latreille had red hair and eyes, he probably would already be the emperor now. Thinking about it, I pity him if he think this way.

Drinking the red tea that Clarisse brewed, the breakfast cum meeting ended for Regis and others.

* * *

On this day, Regis had no room to choose. Even with the intel he have, there was no other option.

Cries of agony and moans could be heard

Wounded soldiers were slowly moved out.

Regis ran down when notified.

Inside the main gate which was undergoing repair was a battlefield.

Soldiers covered in blood were lying on the beds.

Evrard issued an order.

“Warm water! Quick, bring some warm water here!!”

The knights ran around with a vase of water without caring about their appearance.

Jerome, who was wearing armour, kneel down beside a young soldier and began treating him. Shaking his head, he slowly stood up with an angry look.

“Bring a body bag here!”

“Ah, but the prayers have yet…”

The soldier who was ordered gave a troubled voice.

Jerome sent him flying with a kick at him.

“This soldier! Is now dead! This is a fortress and is underground. This is not an open area with good ventilation. If you do not want an epidemic to spread, bring that body bag here now, go!

“Y-yes!"

At the same time he shouted his reply, the soldier began running to get a body bag.

Regis did not have any strength left in his knees, using his shoulders to lean on the stone wall.

“…… Ha, ha,ha.”

“Hang in there! Don’t give up!”

It was a feminine voice. It seemed like Altina was encouraging a wounded soldier

That soldier’s shoulder was injured and bleeding badly, the female doctor was applying bandage on him.

The white cloth was stained with red.

Clean the wound and bandage it—— The medical technology of this age could only do this much. After this depends on the patient’s recovery ability.

A young knight came to Regis. It seemed that he was the commander of the unit that was injured.

“Sir Strategist, there’s something to report! The soldiers who were training in the northern forest were attacked!”

“…… Were attacked?”

About half of the injured were young men. It seemed they brought the bare minimum equipment.

They were the recent recruits.

“Although there was suppose to be a patrol team, it seems that they were killed before they can report.”

Not only did they lost contact with the soldiers that were suppose to report enemy sightings, even the new recruits who were undergoing training were attacked.

Hence, such a large damage was dealt.

Regis who was feeling repulsive finally used his brain.

“From… from which country the enemy belongs to?”

“The flag was not seen. However, based on the direction they came from and their weapons, I believe they are from Germania federation's Grand Duchy of Varden..”

It was the previous owner of this fortress.

Although small, the Germania federation have quality ores and financially fit. They hire outstanding mercenary groups and collect quality weapons.

Regis used a strategy to capture Volk fortress, but the federation’s military power was not weakened by that.

Jerome was agitated.

“Those bastards from Varden! Not only did they not learn their lesson, they are also intending to take back this fortress! Do you think I will just sit here and wait for death!? Hey, bring me my spear and prepare a horse! I’m going to set off and verify whether there are enough heads for me to hack!”

He was of the type that express his feelings out, however, it was so unusual of him to expose so much anger.

The soldiers were feeling the same.

“Please wait!”

“Wait!? How can I wait! Oi, Regis, you sure you want to stop me now!?”

“…… An urgent message just came from the capital.”

Regis finally spoke the words he wanted to say.

Jerome frowned.

“What message, at such a time.”

“…… On the morning of April 23, Chaineboule’s harbour was attacked and have fallen. The Second Army is currently engaging with the enemy that have landed.”

Today was 30th April, 7 days had passed since then.

Considering the network of the military in the capital, they should know this quite early…… I’m afraid that the war is already over.

He was not a god, so he had no way to cross the empire and know the situation of the battlefield.

Jerome groaned.

“The west harbour? I didn’t expect that country to attack us.”

"…… It's like this. The enemy ship is a steamship…… The banner belongs to High Britannia."

"What about Latreille? What did that fellow said?"

"The military ordered, 'prepare half of the unit strength and send them to the west'." The soldiers who heard this began to waver.

Just when the Grand Duchy of Varden attacked, an enemy whose strength was unknown came from the west.

After that, a request for reinforcement by the commander-in-chief came.

If half of the force was sent to the west, only the other half would engage with the Grand Duchy of Varden.

With the terrible situation at the front gate spreading in, it was understandable for them to be uneasy..

Jerome was worried for his men.

He was able to arouse his spirit by saying out what he thought, but able to make calm judgement when needed.

Altina who was beside an injured soldier stood up.

"Regis, what is your opinion on the reinforcement to the west and the enemy who is attacking this fort?"

"I……"

Have no idea.

Although he was a strategist, he was not particularly smart, nor do he has a strong intuition.

Jerome looked over to his direction.

The soldiers too, moved their sight towards him.

Regis does not have much confidence. His heart almost stopped and his legs went weak as he has to voice out his view under such situation.

However, he was current Altina's strategist.

Escaping was not an option.

Regis was searching the books he read before in his head.

Reading countless pages, he recalled stories as numerous as the stars.

"I…… only know this much…… Princess."

Regis only called her 'Altina' in front of people he was close with. If not, he would call her 'princess' in front of others as he was afraid that it might affect the troop morale from any misunderstandings."

"That's fine. What should we do?"

"…… Preparation is insufficient, intel was lacking and we are pressed against time…… Even so, we should repel the Grand Duchy of Varden's army first."

"Is it really okay not to send reinforcement to the west?"

"…… If we send reinforcement under such situation, the soldiers won't be able to fight without any worries. It will only allow the enemy to approach the fort."

"It's indeed worrying. If the fort fall, the streets which their families live will be dangerous."

"Yes. However, it is also a fact that they are not repelled. Perhaps Varden have considered for a drawn-out war…… I suggest that we end this tonight."

"Tonight!?"

It was understandable for Altina to be surprised.

If the battle was on a plains, then it was all about speed. However, in siege battle, it was normal for it to drag on for days.

No matter who wins.

Jerome grinned, it was a smile full of ferocity.

"Kukuku…… Are we moving out of the fort?"

It was the only choice.

Regis replied with a nod.

The soldiers looked at each other.

To actually move out of an advantageous fortress!

Altina clenched her fist.

"Behind Volk fortress is the border city, Tuonvell, which is full of people. Towards the west, there are also citizen that should be protected…… Now is the time that we fulfill our oath of our flag."

Marie Quatre army's flag was a green shield that represents the people.

To protect the empire's citizen—— Altina raised her sword.

Prologue 2 - Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria

The Belgaria empire's territory extended to the northwest part of the continent.

Towards the west coast and across the sea, there exists an island nation.

The kingdom of High Britannia.

The environment was harsh as the northern area was covered in snow, only potatoes and carrots could be cultivated. Leaving ranch aside, even plains were also rare.

Due to their iron ores, the nation progressed as they traded with other countries across the sea.

They value their traditions, but they also actively assimilated foreign cultures and technologies, becoming the first among her neighbouring countries to use steam-engine technology and rifles.

Applewood was a city located in the east of High Britannia. Surrounded by forests stood an academy that was built upon a old castle.

It was known as Saint Edward independent academy, which was the nation's oldest academy. The students were mostly nobles' children who were aged 12 to 16 year old.

Belgaria's third prince, Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria, was studying here since the beginning of the year.

He concealed his identity as he did not want to receive any special treatments.

So he used a fake name, Bastian de Madeleine.

Incidentally, it was common among nobles to be named after princes to borrow their prestige.

In Belgaria, "Bastian" was a common name among nobles who were aged 15 and below.

It have been 16 days since the news of Marie Quatre Army clashing with Grand Duchy of Varden arrived, which coincided with the Belgaria's founding anniversary.

In Saint Edward Academy.

The clock tower resounded.

The figure of the clerical-like teacher slowly disappeared from the classroom.

The students began packing their items. Most of them were going for their after-school club activities.

Bastian was preparing to go back to his dormitory as he have no club activities.

Suddenly, a few High Britannia nobles intruded in.

Leading 2 people was freckled nose Dick Ayrton .

"Oi, Bastian, it seems like your country is invading others again!"

"Huh…? Which country are you referring to?"

"Stop acting like a fool, I'm obviously referring to Belgaria!"

It's not just my country of origin, it is actually ruled by my father —— He could not say something like that.

His identity as the prince was hidden here.

Being an exchange student from Belgaria was unexpectedly troublesome.

The brats were noisily discussing about news from Belgaria from gossips they heard.

They were not interested in politics, but just want to criticise it.

Bastian packed his things as he felt that it would be a waste of time arguing with them.

He grazed by Dick's shoulder.

"I'm not done yet, Galian!"

They often called people from Belgaria that way. There was an official name called Belgariane and that way of addressing Bastian was demeaning. But there was no way he could correct everyone who use that term..

“What… Can’t you see that I’m busy?”

“Ah? Did you not hear my words, Galian invader!”

“It’s not me who is invading anyway.”

“Ah, but isn’t that your country!?”

If you put it that way, I will like to see you guys carry all the wrongdoings of High Britannia.

It was not rare for people to claim they were in the right with twisted logic.

They will even resort to violence to stress their righteousness if you refute them.

More importantly——

“I’m not interested in politics anyway.”

“Ha! It seems that Galians are a bunch of lazy people. Not only are you not interested in music and dance, it seems that Galians are not interested in politics too, how lamentable.”

“Well, it’s a fact.”

He escaped to this academy precisely to avoid the inheritance struggle in Belgaria.

Bastian did not wish to get deeply involved in politics.

It was not that he was totally not interested in music and dance either.

The two followers backed up their leader.

“It can’t be helped Dick, a cultured son of a politician like you thinks differently from those barbaric Galians.”

“Exactly! Those Galians are still using spears even though it’s the age of rifles and cannons.”

“Ha! How obsolete, I wish they could be more cultured.”

Ahahaha, Dick and his followers began laughing.

No matter in which country, those snickering would always sound the same.

Bastian clenched his fist.

A silver ring was on his right hand’s middle finger.

It was his agreement with his grandfather——

If a fight was to happen, immediately return to Belgaria.

As the Belgaria’s emperor was old, the inheritance struggle was getting more fierce as the day in which the emperor abdicating draws near.

The current emperor Liam Fernandi de Belgaria was old.

The most favoured successor should be the 2nd prince Latreille—— Bastian thought.

The evenly matched First prince Auguste also stand a chance, but he is currently recuperating from his illness in a villa.

Even when Bastian went to visit Auguste before leaving for studies in High Britannia, Auguste could only lie on the bed and said some words.

No matter how one looks, it seems he will die earlier than the emperor.

Not just Bastian, no one ever thought things would happen that way. In the recent founding anniversary, because of a certain strategist, Latreille's reputation hit rock bottom while Auguste forfeited his inheritance rights. Her younger sister Argentina being a candidate and involved in the inheritance struggle…

Even so, Bastian was not involved in the fight between factions.

Things like authority was not needed.

Shouldering millions of lives was not a joke.

Hence, he escaped.

Understanding Bastian's wish, his maternal grandfather supported him going overseas to study

In truth, the chances of him being the next emperor was low, but he was still a candidate to be the next emperor.

However, his grandfather said.

"What! To actually want to go overseas!? How splendid! Ah, no, what a pity! Well, compared to you doing foolish thing in the empire, it's better for you to go to the neighbouring small country…… I see, even though you have the caliber of an emperor, if you are so insistent on it, even if I'm overcomed with grief, I can only accept it!"

Although there was some problems, but he was able to go overseas to study.

Precisely because of that, he has to keep his promise.

Bastian muttered.

"…… Don't fight…… Don't expose my identity…… Don't get involved in other countries' politics and religion."

"Hey! What are you muttering, Bastian!"

"Nothing, just a little chant."

"Ahh? Hey, what's that?"

Dick took a book from the packed bag.

A black cover with golden edges. The title and author name was not written.

Bastian almost revealed his true self, using his left hand to suppress his right hand in a hurry.

"…… Please… return it."

What a failure.

Dick looked like he found something interesting.

"Ha! This guy sure is strange! Perhaps what was written inside are Galians' secrets? Seems like there is a need to check this."

"Wait, that, that's just a normal diary."

"Oh? Then, let's check whether this is really a diary or not!"

What a tasteless guy.

Bastian gritted his teeth.

He stretched his right fist out.

The silver ring on his middle finger flashed for a moment.

I promised grandfather. Calm down and do a calm judgement.

"…… If I bury these guys, the fight will not be exposed!?"

Should I do it? Should I?

Dick smirked and opened the book.

"Uhyahyahya!"

"Stop it, fools."

A cold female voice interjected without others feeling it as rude.

A small hand from the side rescued the black book that was slowly opened by the mischievous boys.

One could even see their teeth from Dick and his 2 followers' surprised look.

"What do you want, Archibald!"

"That's my line, idiots. Snatching others properties is something only someone who is lacking in morals, intellectual and humanity will do that, which is worst than an animal. Don't you feel ashamed of yourself?"

Chattering nonstop.

This girl was Bastian's classmate. She was 16 year old, same age as Bastian.

Elise Archibald

Golden hair that reached the knees, sharp brows and eyes.

She was lovely when she smiled. However, whenever her harsh side came out, she was ridiculed as "ignited cannon".

Well mannered, perfect and is a beauty…… The only flaw was her chest size.

Even if the uniform design would change over time, but Elisa's chest would remained flat.

The ribbon fluttered.

"And? Are you still unclear of how to show your worth in this world?"

"Argh…… Do you have to bring it that far!?"

"I do. Are you still not clear? It's foolish trying to save you guys. For you are not aware of yourself being stupid."

"Hey! Archibald! My father is a politician! Moreover, my house is granted the title of a Marquis!"

"Your father is indeed an outstanding politician, though he is incompetent as an educator. He spent 16 years teaching you, yet unable to teach you common sense. How regrettable."

"W-what did you say!?"

"If you do not wish to be said, then don't bring shame to your family by controlling your shameful acts."

"Uu!! How dare you!"

Dick swung his fist.

Bastian who was shocked by Elisa's verbal assault causes him to clench his fist on reflex.

The ring on the middle finger of his right hand creaked.

Elisa was not afraid at all.

"What? You want the mark of being expelled from the school in your uneventful life? You are a fool till the end. If you really want to hit me, I am fine with my face being a little crooked, while you will stay at home hugging your knees and saying 'the world doesn't revolve around me'."

"…… She actually dared him to hit her."

Bastian muttered.

If Dick really attempts to hit her, I will let him swim in the air.

One of Dick's follower tugged his sleeve.

"Hey, Dick. We should leave now. Let's not care about the Galian and the cannon girl, fishing is more interesting than them."

"Ahh…… Then…… It can't be helped, I will end it here today."

The followers praised Dick like 'how generous of you' and 'you will become someone great' while walking out of the classroom.

* * *

On the way back to the dormitory from school.

Some of the old brick walls here were damaged in the war last time. A civil war happened here hundreds of years ago.

There were a few students on the way back.

Bastian and the girl walked together.

“You saved me there, Elise.”

“It’s nothing, Bastian.”

Her right hand was currently holding the book that she took back from Dick.

“This potential masterpiece was about to be buried into darkness by those fools.”

“So it’s not a diary.”

“That’s not a diary, that book, is a story I’m writing!”

She opened the book.

String of words written by Bastian entered her eyes.

“The text is really sloppy.”

“Guh!? It’s fine! when it’s published, it will be reviewed.”

The printers of this age prepare large number of movable pieces for each letters. The letters are pieced together to form a printing board, black ink are applied before it is pressed onto paper.

To use an example, it is a customizable ink stamp. This was known as movable type printing.

Elise shrugged.

“I’m looking forward to whether the technician will be able to decipher your code. Also, the spelling for ‘stupid’ is wrong here. It’s not ‘stuped’, but ‘stupid’. It does look stupid, is that intentional?”

“I-it’s on purpose!”

“Is there any reasons to begin with gloomy words like ‘darkness’ and ‘death’ ?”

“Well, a masterpiece has to begin with an impact. This kind of feeling, there’s no way a novice will understand.”

“To make it more like literature, it’s better to avoid repeating words on 2 consecutive lines.”

“Eh, really!?”

Bastian was totally unaware of such rule. He then stared at his own work.

“No matter what, it can be called a work as long as it is completed, be it a masterpiece or random scribbles.”

I have to start it from the top—— Bastian thought as he said.

“O-oh…… I understand, I will finish writing it. Hey, when it is done, will you read it?”

“Flattery is not my forte.”

“It’s fine, it’s better for you to critique it honestly.”

“I see, in other words, you’re a masochist?”

Silently, Elise widen the distance.

Bastian waved his hand exaggeratedly to deny it.

“That’s not it! T-that…… Although it’s harsh when my work is criticised…… but because I want to be someone who can write a masterpiece, listening to your criticism is to improve myself.”

“What a weird guy.”

“Haha… You’re the same too.”

Elise was weird too.

Being an exchange student from Belgaria, Bastian found it hard to get along with his classmate. However, only this girl accepted him kindly.

“Huu~, I understand. Although it might be a pain, I will read it since I’m partially responsible for making you do so.”

“Hn, it’s a promise!”

“Yes, even if my eyes rot.”

“It’s not that bad! You might be moved to tears! After all, I’m someone who is going to write an masterpiece.”

“Your dream seems so grand.”

“Huhuhu… I want to write the best work in history! Then, all the library in the world will have my work. Everyone will be reading my work fanatically.”

“Only the holy bible and the kind will have that kind of fanatics.”

“Then, my first goal is to exceed the holy bible.”

“The first…… “

This time, Elise stared at Bastian’s face——

Is there something on my face? Bastian who thought this wiped his face.

Elise sighed.

“Oh my god, Bastian!”

“What, you finally realised how great my work is?”

“What are you saying? Ah, a bull is heading this way!……”

“Hn?”

In a moment, a bull which escaped from the ranch occupied the school.

A dark red bull was charging in the small street that was surrounded by walls.

A dust of cloud could be seen.

Although the owner was chasing behind, but he could not catch up with it.

The students yelled while escaping towards the wall.

“We should hurry up and run too, Bastian!”

“No, the owner should be troubled too. Moreover, you can’t climb the wall. You should back off a little.”

“What are you saying!? You will be rammed to death by the bull!”

“It will be fine if it’s just this.”

“A-are you an idiot!?”

“Well, in any case, leave it to me.”

The large bull was getting closer.

Leaving trails of dust behind.

“…… Ahh, looking up front, it seems bigger than expected..”

“You’re really an idiot!”

“What are you saying? I’m someone who is going to write an masterpiece!”

Bastian used his body to take the bull's attack.

The sharp bull's horn was heading towards Bastian's chest——

Caught it!

Bastian grabbed hold of the two horn at the same time.

Normally, when faced with such overwhelming strength, humans were just like a piece of paper.

Bastian's legs were embedded into the ground.

The bull's hooves also stopped.

It should be clear who was the victor when comparing the strength between two human's leg and 4 iron hooves.

Bastian suddenly shouted.

"Be obedient and be raised! Go!! And eat! Your grass!!"

He poured strength into his two hands which was grabbing the horns.

A sound could be heard from that.

The bull also cried vaguely.

Bastian pressed down the horns.

"Toryaa!!"

The front hooves slid.

The ground shook.

"…… It can't be real."

Elise went pale from seeing this.

The chin of the bull was pressed onto the ground, just like a cat or a dog lying down—— The bull which was several times the size of a human was exhausted.

"Ha, it's been a long time since I experienced this kind of things. Now my palms hurts."

"Wait…… Bastian, are you hurt?"

"Ahh, because I'm going to write a masterpiece, my fingers are fine, so don't worry."

"…… How shocking…… Even if I seen it with my eyes…… I'm still unable to believe it."

"Are you saying about my work? Ah, I'm sorry about that."

"You must be an idiot."

The bull's owner came and thanks him.

“Ah, I’m really sorry! Are you fine!?”

“Yes.”

Elise nodded.

“That’s great! It will be bad if the nobles’ children were hurt. Ah, for it to be agitated after getting stung by a bee. It fortunate that it stopped at the critical moment.”

“It’s indeed normal if one thinks that way.”

Elise sighed again.

The students at that vicinity have the look of ‘it’s fortunate that the bull stopped’.

Bastian was silent and did not say anything.

The owner pulled on the reins of the bull and led it away.

Just as he was looking at their figure leaving——

“Ahh!?”

The commotion drew a large crowd. Bastian’s black book has many foot print on it.

Tears fell.

“Uuh…… My future masterpiece……”

“T-that, Bastian?”

“What? I will say it first, but I’m still practicing the autograph.”

“… Ah…… It’s nothing.”

“Like I said, what is it?”

“You’re an idiot, a big idiot, an idiot beyond hope.”

“Do you have to say it 3 times!? I’m so unlucky today, being targeted in the class, my book was flatten by the bull, and was even called an idiot 3 times……”

“Perhaps that’s really true…… Fufu.”

The girl’s cheek redden as she looked at the boy beside her.

The next morning.

Elise Archibald disappeared from the school.

Without bidding farewell to anyone.

Prologue 3 - The black princess and the white knight

“Death sentence is better.”

High Britannia royal castle, Queen’s tower was a beautiful castle with numerous towers.

Princess Margaret Steelart was preparing in one of the towers.

She was sitting on a luxurious red sofa, wearing a silk dress.

She was only 18 this year. In High Britannia, 17 was considered an adult, hence she was an excellent lady.

A semi-nude maid was combing the princess’ black hair that reached to the waist.

Another maid was rubbing the princess’ slender white legs with colourless lotion.

The maids who were attending her were only covered with a piece of cloth while the princess’ hair and skin were glistening.

The room contains a bed with white tiger skin laid over it, white pillars and small circular windows. The flag of High Britannia, together with red and black cloth were hanging on the ceiling, with the light from the gas lamps on the walls flickering.

On the sofa about 3 steps away from the princess was a guy wearing military uniform, and a book in his hand.

“Just death sentence. How merciful.”

The man narrowed his slender eyes.

He was not only tall, but also has long limbs. Coupled with the white knight outfit, it looked refreshing.

His hair was gray with bits of blue while his iris were pale blue.

His name was Oswald Coulthard.

He was Margaret’s aide. However, Margaret was a princess, not a soldier in the army in High Britannia.

By law, he was only just a guard for the royalty.

However, with Margaret’s support, Oswald became a colonel when he was just 20 year old.

He was the third son of a merchant family, so this was a rare occurrence.

Margaret glared with her amber eyes.

“Ahh, is there anything you are unsatisfied with?”

“Unsatisfied…? How can that be? I apologise for showing such rudeness in front of the wise princess.”

“Then, why are you not carrying out the order. How preposterous.”

“Is this order the punishment for the serf who stole bread?

“Yes, I said death sentence for him.”

“In that case, I will carry out your order. However, I can’t let such a vile corpse to dirty the princess’ gem-like eyes… But if he was to never appear in front of you, then your ears will not be defiled by his name.”

“Ara ara, So you are saying… ahhh…… to let him off?”

“That’s not what I meant.”

“Ahh…… This will resulted in criticism like “death sentence for stealing a bread, is that princess a demon?”. I wonder how they will insult me, I’m looking forward to it.”

Margaret had a brilliant smile.

If you only listen to her laughter, she was just like any other girl.

Oswald did not even move a brow.

“I live only for you, princess. The favour I got will never be repaid fully even with this life. For a mere bread thief and the noises of citizens, how can I let the noble princess be troubled over such things.”

“Indeed.”

“I did not carry out the order is because of the princess’ beautiful legs. As to not let other men see your beautiful legs, I did not call them in.”

“Ara, you are so possessive.”

“I’m not ashamed of this as your legs are far more precious than any treasures in this world.”

“Fufu… Looks like you are still good in smooth talking.”

“Those are heartfelt words.”

The maid who was rubbing oil on the princess’ legs moved on to the knees.

Margaret grabbed the hem of the silk dress.

And lifted it up.

Moreover, she opened her legs.

One can almost see what was inside the dress.

“I will leave the matter to you, I’m tired of it. Instead of that serf, tell me something interesting.”

“I understand.”

Oswald was indifferent towards the princess’ action.

At this moment, someone shouting ‘reporting’ could be heard from the cream-coloured door.

“Enter.”

Oswald would not change his serious tone to whoever it might be.

“Pardon me!”

The one who entered was someone who wore the High Britannia military uniform pointed her right fingers to his temple in a salute.

On the left of this officer was a long sword, while on the right was a pistol. Two daggers were hanging on the thighs while a rifle was carried on the shoulders. Her chest pocket was filled with ammunition.

The appearance was more fitting in a battlefield even though they were in the palace now.

Short black hair, sharp eyes and lips that were very straight

The officer was Oswald's adjutant, Glenda, a lieutenant who was just 18 year old.

"A rat was spotted!"

It was not referring to the pest, but referring to spies Oswald sent.

The message was not in a written form, but conveyed orally.

In other words, there was that kind of report.

After saluting Margaret, Oswald went to hear Glenda's report.

The lieutenant tiptoed and whispered into Oswald's ears.

"……"

When the report was done, Glenda saluted and left without saying anything.

Margaret sighed and said.

"What a boring child. At least apply some lipstick. After all, she was fortunate enough to be born as a noblewoman."

High Britannia was ruled by queen. Even the military has many females, though those that were sent to the front line were little.

Glenda was not a man, but a duke's daughter.

After confirming that the lieutenant has left, Oswald did not reply to the princess' conversation regarding make-up and report what he heard.

"The Queen made her move."

The spies hidden in the castle were to observe the actions of queen Charlotte Steelart.

It was always women who hold the crown—— As there were no pressuring issues, there was no war.

The life-expectancy was higher than average and the country was relatively more stable and prosperous compared to other male-dominated countries.

However, the current queen was already 50 year old and was sick and weak recently. It was about time for the next candidate to be named.

Moreover, the king died during an epidemic when he was still young, so there was no heir.

If things were smooth, the daughter of the queen's younger brother, Margaret Steelart, would inherit the throne. The princess was having her legs being plastered with oil in the sofa.

Oswald's status would also be elevated.

However, there was a concern.

Margaret's father was in the war faction, proposing to invade others using their more advanced technologies.

The notion of war was spreading in the parliament, military and the public. Now, those supporting the war were the majority.

On the other hand, the minority faction felt that the most important things were economy and peace.

Queen Charlotte belonged to this faction and strongly opposed any wars.

Opposing the warring faction was a tough thing to do, hence it was likely that the queen would select someone who could stand firm and inherit her beliefs.

Precisely of that, Oswald dispatched spies.

Margaret who raised the hem of the dress on purpose asked as she was interested.

"What about aunt?"

The maid moved on to rub the oil on the inner thighs.

Ah…… Margaret sighed.

Her face let out a seductive smile.

Oswald did not waver and was looking straight into the princess' amber eyes.

"The queen summoned the 6 knights of the imperial guard."

"Oh?"

He received an uninterested reply, but Oswald felt that the princess was not calm at all.

"The 6 knights were called into the queen's room, together with Chamberlain. I dare to say that they've been informed of the successor's name."

"Ah, that's bad. Who did my aunt named?"

"If it was Your Highness, a messenger should have arrived."

Even though they received the news, the queen Charlotte was also staying in the castle, Queen's Tower, just that she was in another tower.

Even if one toured around the castle, it should not be more than half an hour.

"Yeah, how weird. It's really weird. Why, why is there nobody here even though I'm named as the successor?"

Margaret said that deliberately.

It was obvious that she was not selected as the successor.

Even after understanding the importance of the situation, she still cracked a joke. Things like a gloom prospect was just an entertainment to her.

Because she was a big shot or just abnormal? Whichever the case, it was certain that was beyond the common response.

Oswald continued the topic.

“I suspect that the six knights were heading east, towards Applewood.

“I see, I see. If it’s Applewood, then it must be Liz.”

The one she called Liz was her cousin, Elizabeth Victoria. She was the daughter of the queen’s younger sister and was 16 year old.

She was like a younger sister to Margaret.

Elizabeth ranked low in the order of succession , she was very young, her temper and personality were very similar to Charlotte.

She was a pacifist who was firm, courageous and has a strong sense of justice.

“Princess Elizabeth intends to study until July. The queen has to wait until she graduated before naming her the successor. However, she has to decide now due to her frail body and national affairs.”

“Ara, for my aunt to be sick, I’m so worried.”

“You sure are caring, princess. If the queen hear this, she will certainly be overjoyed.

“That’s for sure.”

“Hmm… And? Do I have to congratulate Liz when she get crowned?”

“That’s unnecessary.”

“Ahh, what a pity, pink roses suit that child more.”

“I see, but don’t you think that it’s too bright for a wreath?”

“Is that so? Then I’ll choose another flower.”

“Noble princess, I implore you to wait for a little longer.”

“Ahh…… Don’t let me feel bored, Oswald.”

“Of course.”

It was expected that Margaret was not selected by queen Charlotte from the start.

The instruction has already been issued.

Setting off right now and deploying Margaret’s supporters in Applewood.

The 6 knights should not be able to safely return, Elizabeth too.

Oswald then changed the topic to the streets performance.

While conversing, he was hatching plots.

Margaret inheriting the throne was only a part of his plan.

Inside his head was the world map, focusing Belgaria and other huge countries.

Chapter 1: Princess Elizabeth

In the morning when the visitors arrived.

In the midst of the morning fog, the female dormitory door was knocked.

St. Edward Independent Academy was surrounded by old walls that were damaged during a war in the past and were preserved with the damage as such.

There were times when ruffians broke in.

But bandits would not knock…

The female dorm manager was a veteran from the military. She opened the door in her sleepwear with a longsword that was passed down from her ancestors in her hand.

There were six knights outside the door.

Instead of their usual red cloak, they were currently in a black outerwear.

“We apologise for disturbing you so early. We are knights under Queen Charlotte's direct service.”

“What…!?”

The dorm manager could tell they were real knights from their manner and build.

Needless to say, they also have the pendent that represents the Royal Coat of Arms. There was no reason for her to doubt their firm gaze and serious tone.

The knight at the front spoke.

“Is there someone here named Elise Archibald?

“Y-yes.”

Only the dorm manager knew Elise’s real identity in this dorm. Precisely of that, she knew that Elise’s destiny has come even though she was still a student.

“Madam, do you understand the current situation?”

“Yes.”

“Then I will cut to the chase., I hope that you will bring us to princess Elizabeth Victoria’s room.”

The door to the one calling herself Elise—— Elizabeth’s door was knocked.

She had finished tidying up and opened the door.

The 6 knights knelt and bowed to her beside the bed.

Other students who were curious wanted to find out what happened, only to be chased back to their room by the glare of the dorm manager.

The students were at an age where they were full of curiosity. Furthermore, their school lives lack excitement. Hence, there were still a number of people peeping from their door.

It seemed impossible to hide it completely.

However, the knights were not bothered at all.

“Princess Elizabeth, we apologise for our sudden arrival due to this urgent matter.. Please forgive us as .”

“…… Did something happened to Her Majesty?”

“The health of Her Majesty is weak. The chief doctor concluded without any hesitation.”

“What!……”

“Please allow me to present this from Her Majesty.”

A box covered in sapphire was taken out.

Elizabeth took the box with her left hand and opened the box——

It was a rose ring.

It was the symbol of the High Britannia Royalty. The royal symbol was engraved on the ring while gold was used to craft the rose.

“Does this mean that… I have to become… the next queen?”

“It's the will of Her Majesty Charlotte.”

The knights were like silent statues, waiting for a reply.

Elizabeth hesitated.

Accepting the ring meant that she could not live a normal life anymore.

She would not be able to go to school.

Moreover, she has to carry the fate of the whole nation on her shoulders. She would obtain great authority, but at the expense of her freedom.

“…… Because it’s my duty…… I won’t run from it.”

She picked the ring up and put it on her left hand ring finger.

The ring was slightly bigger than her finger.

Just a slight movement would cause the ring to fall off unless she held it tightly.

“Looks like the ring is a little too big for me.”

“For a formal succession, the parliament has to acknowledge you…… However, according to the traditions of the royal family, Lady Elizabeth is already the queen of High Britannia.”

In short, she was not recognised as the queen by law, but was recognised as a queen according to the traditions.

As the knights valued traditions, they were already treating Elizabeth as a queen, and simply conveyed this to her.

The knight pulled the sword out of the scabbard from his waist.

And place the tip onto the floor.

“Although it isn’t the castle and the ceremony is without witnesses, …… we swear on our honour as knights, to be loyal to Lady Elizabeth forever.”

The girl nodded.

“I appreciate that. This nation and I, will be left in your care.”

“We’re willing to do so even if it cost us our lives!”

The knights’ hands were together, heads bowed down.

After that, they immediately kept the sword back to their waist and had a serious expression.

“Although it’s a little rushed, but please return to the castle, Lady Elizabeth.”

“To see the queen?”

“…… That will be the best scenario.”

The knights’ expression conveyed the bad situation to her.

According to High Britannia Law——

After the death of the queen, seven days would be spent mourning, which was also known as “The Silent Week.”

After the mourning period, when the parliament recognised the selected candidate, she would be the new queen.

Also known as “Dawn of the Declaration.”

“In other words, we have to return before the Silent week…… Is that it? Is it in such a severe situation?”

They were racing against time.

The knights fell silent.

Elizabeth looked back into her room.

The study table which she was used to, the uniform on the wall and the bag she used.

In addition, a boy face surfaced in her brain.

It was silent for a moment.

Elizabeth raised her small head, all the thoughts she had vanished.

“…… We must set off now.”

“Yes. I believe that the men sent by Margaret will not expect Lady Elizabeth travel to the castle so swiftly.”

The knight who was at the most back spat out spiteful words.

“Those people have the thoughts to trample you, Lady Elizabeth.”

Although the other knights tried to quiet him down, the words he used show that he was already controlling his emotion the best he could.

Elizabeth nodded.

“In other words, you mean that they will try to assassinate me?”

“We will not let that happen, if anyone tries to do so, we will show no mercy. Originally, we should have come with the royal carriage, but considering that the trip will take five days…… We used the steam-powered vehicle that only requires one day to reach Applewood.”

“Even though you are all knights, you used the steam-powered vehicle?”

This was certainly outside her expectation.

The imperial knights would do things with formality as they were very particular about it.

The knight that has a proud look, smiled.

“The men sent by Margaret will not expect us not using the carriage. We came by horse from Applewood station and had prepared a carriage there…… Although this does not suit you, princess Elizabeth.”

“I have yet to be acknowledge by the parliament. A loaned carriage is fine.”

“I’m grateful for that. We will be sitting the steam-powered vehicle back to the capital while Margaret’s men continue to chase after the royal carriage.”

According to traditions, the new queen would use the royal carriage to enter the capital.

However, the situation right now does not allow it.

Elizabeth’s hand was stretched towards the closet at the room's end..

“I’ll be ready in a moment, please wait for awhile.”

The six knights lowered their heads together.

Not long after that, the girl name Elise, queen Elizabeth boarded the carriage and set off towards Applewood station.

From behind, the school clock resounded.

* * *

Out of the dorm to the road that was surrounded by the walls, a large number of students already enter the school buildings.

Bastian was walking to his classroom while trying to stay awake.

His sight stopped at Elise’s seat.

How strange, for her not to be around.

As usually, she would come early in the morning to study or clean the room alone, even though she does not have any social activities.

“Hmm……How rare for me to have inspiration for the story yesterday night.”

Bastian dusted his bag.

Inside was the masterpiece he spent the whole night to write.

The imprint left by the bull was still there.

“Hu…… Hurry up and come, you will definitely be moved after reading it!”

Although he spoke quite softly to himself, the surrounding students had an surprised look.

However, Elise did not appear.

The girls looked at Elise’s seat and was whispering something.

They looked quite focused.

As Bastian did not have many friends, he was sensitive to negative mood.

If want to do, just do it, actions should be taken!

Bastian went and talked to the girls who were whispering.

“Hi, do you have a moment?.”

“Eh? Ah, okay.”

They actually listened to me.

Foreigners are great!

According to Belgaria’s palace etiquette, if one interrupted the noblewomen's conversations, everyone face would pale and the one who interrupted them would feel awkward to the point his body was like sent flying.

Strangely, the nobles were afraid of Bastian.

In this school, those things won’t happen right? It should be okay to have a normal conversation.

“Elise, did she caught a cold?”

“That…”

The girls looked at each other.

And was speechless.

“What is it? Is it something that has to be hidden from me?”

“I-it’s not really that way……”

The girl’s face was slowly showing fear.

Not good.

He maintained an image of a serious and kind young man at this school.

“It’s fine, it’s fine, there’s nothing to be afraid of. Can’t you tell me about it?”

“T-that…… Lady Elise, she…”

“Lady Elise?”

“Yes. Lady Elise is actually princess Elizabeth Victoria!”

Bang bang! Following the momentum of such sound, the girl replied.

The class was filled with surprised sounds and sighs.

Bastian went “okay” and nodded his head.

“Ahh, is that so, then? The reason why she didn’t come to school is a cold right?”

“Are you not surprised!? Ah, could it be that you knew it!? After all, the relationship between you two seems rather good.”

“No, I didn’t know at all……”

The people around him gave a astonished look.

Oh no.

Not being surprised after hearing that our classmate is actually a High Britannia princess is a big no!

“A-ah! T-that surprised me!”

“…… To a Belgariane like you, the High Britannia Royal family means nothing to you, hmph.”

He was given a cold treatment.

Moreover, he was the center of the sight of his class. *The stares hurts.*

“T-that’s not it.”

It’s not that I’m looking down on this country—— How do I say, that person and I are similar—— Thinking this way, rather than being surprised, we will resonate with each other instead.

“Still, you’re also a Belgaria Nobility, even if your actions are wrong…… Lady Elise isn’t sick or anything.”

“Then, why is she not coming to class?”

“The knights have come to fetch her. She should be heading towards the capital. It must be that she’s becoming our nation new queen!”

The girls were quite excited as the topic slowly changed.

Once again, the class got noisy.

Having the queen as their classmate was a huge honour.

Some were worried about their attitude towards her.

Those kind of thoughts were also mixed in. Talking about that, Dick and his followers had a pale face.

As they often put Bastian in a tough spot, there were several times they argued with her, hence their reaction was normal.

“Eh? ah, wait a moment, in other words, she won’t be coming to school anymore?”

“What are you talking about! She’s no longer a normal citizen! Nor is she a nobility! She’s High Britannia queen, hence it’s unlikely she will be coming out just for school.”

“Ehh!? Then…… If I want to meet with her again?”

“Are you addressing her disrespectfully? You must call her queen Elizabeth or her majesty!”

“Is it for real?…… For her to be the queen…”

“You two are no longer in the same world.”

“Doesn’t that mean that I can’t meet her other than for diplomatic negotiation? So I need to be a diplomat for that!?”

“Eh, talking about diplomat…… For Belgaria!? Could it be that your house is a prestigious house? I certainly heard before a duke house or something similar?”

Someone from the Duke house position was higher than others, however that was not enough to represent the nation. Precisely of that, he used it for his fake identity.

Talking with the girls causes Bastian to cool down.

“Hnn… No… I'm… from an Earl house”

“Putting aside that topic, even as a duke from Belgaria, isn’t meeting High Britannia Queen fairly difficult for him too?”

“That’s right.”

In actual fact, Bastian was the third prince, hence he has the chance to meet her as a royalty.

However, as a diplomat, do I give my work together with the letter written by the King?

That’s impossible!

“…… Hey, just now… you said she is the new queen… right?”

“What about it?”

“In that case, doesn’t it mean officially, she’s not the queen yet!?”

Pressed by Bastian, the girls became afraid and retreated a few steps back.

“Y-yes… In High Britannia, the new queen only inherit the throne after the Dawn of Declaration.”

Talking about this, I did remember hearing this.

When the current queen dies, there should be a mourning period called Silent Week, but it’s best that I don’t say it out.

Even for Bastian, he knows how to read the mood.

“In short, she’s not the new queen yet right? Good! It’s only possible for me to give it to her right now~”

“W-what?”

“I must meet with her before she becomes the queen no matter what.”

“Putting it that way… Do you have some message to pass to her?”

“Eh? Yeah, you can say that.”

Since I already wrote it with resolve, it’s obviously that I have to give it to her.

Bastian was only thinking about things like ‘this is so cool’ and such.

The girls’ face began to redden.

“Ehhh~ A love that transcend social status! Moreover, it’s across borders!”

“But it’s not that type of story though?”

What Bastian wrote was “Magic dwells in my right hand and I beat up demons from hell with it”.

Huhu. the girls shook their heads.

Their eyes were sparkling as if they saw a good dream.

“It’s fine! You don’t have to be embarrassed about it! We will even support you!”

“…… Okay……”

It seems there’s some misunderstanding.

Still, compared to being loathed, being misunderstood is better.

I still need to find out where Elise is.

“Elise, where is she now? Going towards the castle in a carriage?”

The girls frowned, correcting him “She’s Lady Elizabeth, not Elise.” and replied.

“If they set out from here by using a carriage, they should be on their way to Applewood station. Still, I think they have yet to reach there as they set off only slightly before we come to school.”

The clock on the wall was not reliable at all.

Bastian took a pocket watch out from his shirt.

“Seems like there’s still thirty minutes. I wonder if a carriage could reach Applewood in time.”

“Erm, including the waiting time for the steam-powered train, perhaps you probably can just make it?”

Even so, once it is time for the train to leave, I will still not be able to see her.

Hu—— Bastian inhaled a breath.

“Recently I have been slacking off, I have no idea how far I can go… Still, if I get serious now, I should be able to catch up with her halfway.”

“Eh?”

“So that’s it, I’m leaving early today. I’ll leave informing the teacher to you, thanks.”

Bastian picked up his bag and dashed out of the class.

His class were in an uproar.

The girls who seemed to be misunderstanding something as they waved their handkerchiefs to encourage Bastian.

Since she’s not yet the queen, I will be able to pass her the book directly.

Hearing a ‘thank you’ from her will be difficult, based on her personality, she will definitely write one out instead.

Bastian was acting casually as he did not know about High Britannia’s political situation.

He panted as he ran in the cold April.

Using all his strength to run.

Chest hurts.

As the bag hindered him running, he took the black book out and tossed the bag aside.

He slotted the book between his waist and the belt and fastened the belt to secure it.

The school shoes were out of shape.

It was not that the quality was bad.

In the first place, there was no shoe that was suitable for a human that runs faster than a horse.

* * *

The knight's name was Graham.

He was the eldest son of a reputable family that has served the Britannia Royalty since the first generation.

He thoroughly trained his swordsmanship, and carried the pride of his family in his chest, he faced this mission with the resolve to be the queen's shield.

Even when law changed and technological advancement changed people's lives, the imperial knights still valued tradition. Even so, the royal carriage which was a tradition was used as a decoy instead.

The subordinates of the 6-man team who all wore a crimson cloak vowed to protect the green carriage.

They might even fall during the escort.

Even knowing that, they still accepted the task. They were indeed patriotic.

If things were smooth, Graham and the knights would use the locomotive, while their subordinates act as the decoy to safely escort Princess Elizabeth.

Although he considered leading the military to welcome Elizabeth, he rejected the idea as the castle had to be adequately guarded while the Queen was on her sickbed.

In addition, when the manpower increased, be it preparation or the execution speed would suffer, and they did not have the leisure to do so.

Though I'm a little uneasy……

Things have been smooth for now.

Two small horses were chosen with speed in their mind.

Saint Edward Independent Academy was located in the endless field at the east of High Britannia

The sea was just a little further towards the east.

As it was the border, the roads were not maintained nor was there any relay station.

Currently, they could only use a carriage to travel towards the train station which was the best they could do.

The six knights were surrounding the carriage, protecting it. Graham and another knight were sitting opposite of Elizabeth.

There were 4 people in the carriage.

The last person who was travelling together with them was the owner of the carriage.

The journey was silent throughout.

Ever since Elizabeth left the school, she has been keeping quiet.

"…… "

"Are you not in a good mood?"

Elizabeth shook her head towards Graham who asked the question.

"No, there's no problem. Although I'm a little nervous…… Leaving that aside, there's a promise that I have yet to fulfill, so it's a little regretful."

"Is it a promise with your classmate?"

"Yes. Although I said that, it's just a childish promise. He should also understand that."

“That’s obvious.”

Graham did not continue asking, nodding his head instead.

The other party should be a boy.

Hearing the young and beautiful princess speaking about the opposite sex causes ripples in Graham’s heart.

There’s no need to dwell on this, Princess Elizabeth is intelligent, she will not mix her private affairs with her work.

Starting from now, she is someone who is going to shoulder the whole nation throughout her life.

Unconsciously, Graham’s sight stopped at Elizabeth.

Elizabeth slightly shift her sight downwards.

“Hmph……”

“M-my apologies.”

Graham quickly shifts his sight towards outside.

The surrounding was a forest.

The road cut a path through the trees, a barren path that had not been paved with anything. The rain last night formed puddles in the uneven grounds.

This time, Elizabeth asked.

“…… Sir, have you ever written a story before?”

“A story is it? No, other than writing a report, I have never written anythings.”

“That’s normal.”

“Has Lady Elizabeth written one before?”

“No…… I never thought about leaving my story behind.”

Graham fell silent and did not probe further.

Elizabeth who mentioned this topic seemed vulnerable and like a girl of her age.

Although that might make young girls attractive, it is not suitable for someone who is going to be the ruler.

Still, there shouldn’t be a problem. After inheriting the throne in the capital, worldly wants will certainly disappear.

Just like the instant when a butterfly comes out of the cocoon, she is now is stuck in the gap, Graham thought.

Suddenly, a gunshot resounded.

Immediately after that was Graham’s teammate voice, causing Graham’s heart to skip a beat.

“The driver has fallen!”

Elizabeth and company was in a stagecoach carriage, where there was only a door. The driver stage was outside, hence they could not move recklessly.

Therefore, Graham shouted toward the knights outside.

“Guide the horse! Do not stop until we reach the road!”

Graham held the sword in his hand.

--*Just what had happened!?*

The other knights were also holding their swords as they paled and shoulders shaking.

“I-is it an ambush?”

“If that’s the case, then it should be bandits and the like, we shouldn’t be discovered by Margaret’s faction!”

“Hmph… Hyaah! Isn’t it a little too fast?”

The shaking of the carriage was getting more and more intense.

It was obvious that the horses were picking up speed.

The path in the forest was shaped like a snake. Leaving aside the stamina of the horses, the carriage itself was also quite heavy.

In addition, the horses had no breaks during the journey.

The speed was too fast and the wheels were rolling on uneven ground.

“Watch out! Lady Elizabeth-- Argh!”

“Hyaa!”

Graham hugged the girl opposite of him tightly.

An attack.

The other knights let out a shriek

Graham’s head received an strong impact.

He seemed to have lost focus for a moment.

He was unsure how much time had passed.

After a few impact, Graham opened his eyes.

Confirming the warmth on his hand.

“Lady Elizabeth, are you alright!?”

“…… I’m fine.”

“What a relief…… can you move?”

“Probably.”

The carriage toppled.

The other knight who was with them was unlucky. His head was twisted in a direction that was impossible.

There was no time for prayers.

“Lady Elizabeth, we need to get outside immediately.”

Graham turned towards the seat and push open the door which was on top of their heads.

The enemy should have yet to catch up.

The carriage toppling over is due to the speed, there should be some distance between us and the enemy.

“Lady Elizabeth, please allow other knights to escort you on horse! Although it’s not comfortable, please carry out the punishment only after reaching the capital.”

“Sir, what are you planning to do?”

“…… I will catch up later.”

Graham carried her out of the carriage.

The enemy formation is unknown

If there are many bandits, I can only stall for time at most.

However--

“If it’s just mere bandits, I will not lose no matter how many come at me.”

“Is it really just bandits?”

“Probably.”

There was too little information. Graham do not even see the enemy’s shadow.

But if it were the other knights who were guarding outside, then he could make a judgement.

After coming out of the carriage, Graham scanned the surrounding.

There were fallen horses.

Knights who were wearing black outerwear were lying on the ground near them.

They should be the knights who were the same as Graham.

Graham’s mates who were imperial guards were motionless on the ground.

“W-what has happened……!? “

“…… Could it be…… that they are…… dead?”

Elizabeth's voice was shaking.

Although it was an age of war, Elizabeth was still a normal girl who attended school in High Britannia's noble academy. This was probably her first time seeing someone dying in a battle.

It was natural for her to be shaken.

Although Graham has experience in the frontline, but he has left the battlefield for quite some time. Moreover, the friends who were in the same path as him were dead, thus he was unable to control his emotions too.

Nevertheless, the enemy was stronger than expected as they could even defeat the imperial guard.

From the road, sound of numerous footsteps were approaching.

It was a squad.

They were holding lances and rifles, their bodies were wrapped with light armors of the High Britannia army.

The one leading them seemed to be the border's commander. He was wearing a blue military uniform, with a gold medal on his chest.

Graham shouted,

"You bastard, which unit are you from!? You dare attack knowing that I'm an imperial guard?!"

"Kukuku…… As a guard of the queen, to actually use a loaned carriage, moreover you changed your crimson cloak to a black outerwear. Your ancestors are crying."

"To point the muzzle at me after knowing I'm an imperial guard… and you dare insult my ancestors! Nonsense!"

"This is for the country."

Graham drew his sword, protecting Elizabeth. Behind him was the carriage and the forest.

The soldiers that were led by the commander were at a distance to fire at any signal.

The distance was about thirty steps.

There were about three hundred soldiers, which was not a lot.

However, there was only Graham left, protecting Elizabeth and escorting her escape successfully would be difficult.

Sweat rolled down his forehead.

"…… Sir, you're also a commander of High Britannia, this person here is Lady Elizabeth, the candidate chosen by Queen Charlotte. Are you going to kill her with your own hands??"

"Right now, a pacifist queen will only hinder the development of this country. For you to be unaware of this, looks like the imperial guards have also rusted."

"You bastard……"

Apparently, he does not care about Graham being an imperial knight or that Elizabeth was the next queen.

After that, a gun was pointed at them.

Graham said softly.

"…… Please escape, Lady Elizabeth…… I will stall for time."

"That!?…… Are you going to sacrifice yourself?"

"That's not what I wished for…… because I'm not that smart. The decoy must have been seen through by them."

"Exactly why……"

"I believe it is princess Margaret's close aide, Oswald Coulthard. Rumours that he is someone that's quick to respond."

Hence, a resolution was made.

After much consideration, mobilising the military to receive Elizabeth might only finish when the queen died—— Hence, only a few imperial guards were sent instead.

In the end, it was not that this was a wrong judgement.

Exactly why was that the enemy able to see through this?

Although the reason was unclear, but it was a fact that there was an ambush here.

It was a desperate situation.

Even so, as long as Elizabeth survived, there was a possibility that she would be rescued.

Graham hid her behind his back.

"Please escape! I won't be able to battle with you around!"

"Y-you are not allowed to die!"

"Of course, I will definitely catch up with you later!"

Although it was a lie.

After sending Elizabeth off with just moving his brows, Graham picked his sword up and entered a battle stance.

Countless guns were pointing at him.

They would probably fire if he were to rush forward.

On the ground were his fallen friends.

He would soon meet the same fate as his friends…… His only regret was that he could not escort the future queen back safely.

Graham shed a tear.

Oh god, have you abandoned me?

Just when Elizabeth was escaping.

Equipped with a silver armour, steel shield and a small gun. Graham covered for her with him standing in front with a fighting stance.

The enemy commander raised his fist and swung down.

"——Fire!!"

The innumerable gun sounds resounded loudly.

* * *

Elizabeth ran towards the forest.

She did not expect such a cruel thing to happen. As she did not want to trouble the knights anymore, she wore leather shoes instead. Thanks to that, she could ran towards the forest without much trouble.

If she was wearing ceremonial shoes instead, she would not be even able to run.

However, she was still a sixteen year old girl.

Her speed could not be compared with a trained soldier.

Even if they were equipped with armour and holding guns.

Innumerable sounds of footsteps were approaching.

It seemed that there really was about three hundred soldiers, hence hiding herself was a difficult task.

Someone fired a gun

Towards the tree that Elizabeth hid behind.

They attacked,

Have they seen me?

The soldiers gathered after hearing the gunshot. "Found you", said the soldiers while hints of laughters could be heard.

This was just like a fox hunt.

Elizabeth did not like fox hunting in the first place, if she survived, she swore that she would never hunt a fox her whole life.

Another shot was fired.

The shoulder which was grazed was hot.

"Eek!?"

Not only just the pain from the shot, her legs stopped due to her fear.

Hence, she tripped.

Her hands came in contact with the twigs on the ground while rolling.

"!?"

Her pinky grazed the twigs, causing it to bleed.

"It's done!", the soldiers shouted to pass down the message.

I-I can still move.

Escape.

…… What about it? Continuing to escape would result in getting attacked again.

I'm sure that this time, I will be hit.

If it's a shot to the head, it might be painless, but if it is on the leg or the waist, it will be very painful.

"Uugh…"

Regardless, this seems to be my limit.

Be it Graham who let me escape, or the imperial knight who died when the carriage toppled over, I'm sorry.

Also the queen who chose me too, for me to die at this kind of place, she must be disappointed.

When Margaret becomes the queen, a war will surely happens.

Although Elizabeth only spoke with her cousin, Margaret, a few times, the image of Margaret smiling and saying "I don't care about politics, it's fine if it's interesting" appeared in her mind.

Elizabeth was also aware that the more and more citizens were supporting for a war.

But that was only limited to the males.

Elizabeth felt sorry for the female population who could not protect and would lose their fathers, husbands or brothers.

Those who supported the war did not experience what she had gone through——Soldiers using guns to take lives away.

Such cruel and tragic thing, they might even regret being born. Once they understand that…… They would definitely think twice about going to war.

Footsteps were drawing closer.

The voices of the soldiers could be heard.

"I'm the one who hit her!"

"No, it's me!"

"Nonsense! It is me who stopped her!"

“If we are talking about who hit her, it should be me!”

It was like a carnival to them

If they were aware that the target was still alive, how would they react?

Tracing the blood, the soldiers found Elizabeth.

Their eyes met each other.

“She’s still alive!”, someone shouted.

All of them were excited.

Just like a beast howling.

The men were ready to attack…

Elizabeth was not confident that she could maintain her consciousness till the very last moment.

She was scared.

Too scared..

She even forgot to say her prayers.

Just like this, she closed her eyes.

At this moment, she heard a familiar voice.

“Elise——!!!!!!!!”

That boy came flying from the forest.

The boy then used his monstrous strength and defeated the soldiers who were equipped with guns.

After that, that boy carried Elizabeth who was on the ground tightly.

Gunshots resounded.

Faster than the sound of the gunshot, the boy leaped.

The place where Elizabeth was moments ago was riddled with bullets.

Even when he was carrying someone, he was just like a deer in its habitat, running through the trees like a flash.

A smile emerged from his face.

“Stupid! Didn’t I tell you to retaliate by screaming out loud to counter the killing intent from others?!”

“Y-you…… Am I seeing things…”

“Did you bite your tongue, Elise?”

The face of the boy who was hugging her drew closer.

It was actually a face that she thought she would never see again.

“——Bastian!”

“Yeah?”

“W-why are you here!?”

“Because of the promise.”

He was expressionless, just a gale, he came here at a speed comparable to a train.

Tat tat, his steps on the ground sounded like hooves.

“Pro…promise…?”

“Yeah! The one that you promised to read my manuscript if I finished it!”

“… Are you a fool?”

“Eh… Were you lying to me!?”

“It’s not a lie. Although I didn’t lie to you…… But…… to actually outrun a carriage for something like that.”

Moreover, he saved her from the soldiers.

Bastian frowned.

“According to my plan, I wanted to pass the work to you before you reach the station. After all, you are the type that will write a reply about your impression of it.”

“It’s obvious that I will do that…… “

“It’s good if that’s the case… but, the horses and people were dead, and the carriage was toppled.”

“……”

Remembering the dead driver and knights, Elizabeth pace of breathing increased.

Is Bastian used to seeing dead people? He doesn't seems shaken at all.

"Based on their clothes, they should be the imperial guards, yet I couldn't find your body. After that, I heard noise coming from the forest. It is normal to assume someone was pursuing you."

"Normally, people will just escape as they sensed danger.

"What a fool you are, Elise."

"Eh?"

"If that's the case, you won't be able to read my masterpiece. It's something that I wrote overnight."

"…… The fool should be you instead……"

"Eh, eh?"

"A genuine… fool."

Elizabeth cried.

"Eh!? Erm, Elizabeth, why are you crying!? Are you feeling pain!? Are you injured anywhere!?"

She used her fingers to wipe away her tears.

She shook her head.

"I'm not… feeling any pain… I'm fine……"

She was not injured anywhere.

It was just that she was overcome with grief for the people who were dead. At the same time, thankful that she was saved. Feeling of ease, grief and remorse were mixing and busting out.

She seemed to feel something warm at the corner of her eyes.

Bastian's voice was heard.

"Spare me. Although my masterpiece is breathtaking, but to be moved to tears before reading…"

"…… Fool."

Faster than a horse, Bastian emerged out of the forest.

Chapter 2: Silent week

“What did you just say?”

A hoarse female voice said.

Oswald Coulthard who was asked, lowered his head and used the same tone to reply.

“Your Majesty Charlotte, just as I reported…… Princess Elizabeth Victoria, who was heading here from Saint Edward Independent Academy had an accident and is currently missing.”

The queen’s face grew paler and paler, which contrasted with the crimson robe and golden crown.

Her wrinkled face, due to her illness, looked like a fifty year old elderly. While the scepter in her hand felt like her walking stick.

Her voice was trembling.

“It can't be… what about the imperial guards…”

“This is also very unfortunate, but it seems that all of them died in the line of duty.”

“For the 6 imperial guards to be attacked at the borders and the princess missing…… Is it really a simple accident?”

The queen probed with a squeezed voice.

However, Oswald's expression did not change even a little. A smile was stuck on his face like a mask.

“It is so. This was just an unfortunate accident. As a means of toughening their training, I dispatched the standard unit to bring back the bodies of the imperial guards…… It’s a shame, but it is only a matter of time before we find Princess Elizabeth’s body.”

The butler beside the queen shouted.

“Insolence!”

However, he quieten down when the two knights fully equipped with a sword in their hands beside Oswald tightened their guard.

“Pardon me if I sounded rude, but what I have reported is the truth.”

Oswald used a calm tone to reply.

The queen was trembling.

“Ughhh, why did things became like this?”

She was repeating a thin, irregular breathing. A wheezing sound, like cold air passing through the door, came from inside her throat.

The butler quickly went to support the queen.

“This is bad! Doctor! Doctor!”

The doctors were probably on standby just outside the audience room. The door opened immediately and seven people dressed in white entered.

As the queen was receiving treatment, her eyes were dull and she murmured.

“Cough… Margaret, you crazy fool… Are you trying to ruin the country with war?……”

Oswald replied to her after a moment of silent.

“Ah? If we are talking about the aims of war, there’s only one. The reason why nations go to war is due to the benefits they can gain. A nation is a place where people gather. For them to survive, it’s about economic activity. In other words, the aim of war is to gain wealth, Your Majesty.”

“……Wretch…… Devil! Are my citizens going to die for the sake of money!?”

“The lifespan of human is about hundred years. In that case, there’s not much loss even if they die earlier. To be able to make their own country prosperous, isn’t it a prestige and honour for patriots?”

“Sophistry! Do you want wealth that badly?…… A noble title, high military position at such a young age…… You should be satisfied…… but…… why do you, still want money?”

“Your words flatter this humble servant. I am truly blessed to serve in such an honorable capacity.”

“Then…… Why?”

“It’s impossible for you, a born royal, to understand…… I have indeed obtained status and wealth…… Even so, there is still the desire for more, that’s how humans are.”

Oswald intentionally said this in a roundabout way.

The queen clutched her chest.

“Damn you! Ugh!?…”

“Your Majesty! Please refrain from speaking anymore!”

As if she was depleting her vitality, she shook off the doctors, shouting “A greedy person like you will receive divine punishment! May you burn in hell after death!”

“Is that so? I believe that my desires are as common as the stones along the streets…… It will be an honour if God noticed it.”

Oswald replied as if he was praying.

The queen squeezed her chest, eyes rolled back, foaming.

The doctors were desperately shouting ‘Your Majesty!”

Oswald bowed and left the audience room.

Coming out of the room, Oswald led the two knights and exited Queen’s tower. In a corridor that was lined with stone pillars, the middle was laid with red carpet.

A black-haired girl clad in a silk dress appeared from the back of a stone pillar.

She was Margaret.

“Ara, you came back so fast. Is the talk with my Aunt over?”

“To be graced by Your Highness Margaret’s presence, this humble servant is about to faint due to this great honour.”

“Is that so, that will be troublesome. Tell me the things I want to know before fainting, Oswald.”

“Esteemed princess, this area is not suitable for such talk. How about the balcony over there?”

“How troublesome.”

The balcony was facing the courtyard.

It was afternoon right now, the warm rays of mid-April were shining on it.

There was also a breeze.

There were table and chairs.

The princess crossed her legs.

The white thighs which were hidden by the dress were exposed. Oswald was standing beside her, hands behind his back while surveying the area.

The knights in heavy armor were guarding at the door while the maid made tea.

Margaret began the conversation.

Oswald bowed and said,

“…… The audience with Her Majesty…… As this humble servant was ill-prepared, I have disgraced myself.”

“Ara, did something went wrong?”

“I had no other choice but to provoke her…… It was my miscalculation for the Commander of Applewood to lose princess Elizabeth. Originally, I wanted to present her body and end it.”

“True, it’s just like her to probe, how troublesome.”

“My apologies.”

“Liz, is she still safe?”

“She was saved by a boy and escaped towards the mountains.”

“Ahh, she will come to the capital, I’m looking forward to it. The present should be Applewood’s pie then. If it’s around this time, the pie won’t spoil that easily.”

“… … Here? But many soldiers here have the same idea as this humble servant, there are even some who knew about the assassination of princess Elizabeth mixed among them.”

“It’s fine. If she does not come, I will be the queen, right? I will start a war then.”

“Will she appear alone just to stop the war from happening?”

“Yeah, Liz is like that, a good person, isn’t she? I’ll make a tart for her. Liz doesn’t like strawberry as it is sweet and sour at the same time. Hehehe.”

“Is that so?”

“I’m looking forward to it. Ah, can’t it happen faster? I will be waiting for you with a strawberry tart.”

“How kind of you.”

Oswald had more terrifying actions.

Searching the mountains and villages nearby to find the body and trample the Queen’s spirit.

If Elizabeth returned, Oswald’s tactic would be crazier. He thought of sending soldiers to Applewood and watch over the main road, though he would need to change his image of Elizabeth being just a clever girl. Margaret tilted her cup and said,

“That reminds me, I heard that the imperial guards prepared a decoy.”

“Yes, the royal carriage which was protected by the imperial guards’ subordinates was a decoy.”

“Why did you not fall for it? How interesting.”

“It’s simple. Even if the five imperial guards are united, but their subordinates are not stone. A human heart is moved by money after all.”

“I see, so you bribed them.”

“My apologies, this method was uninteresting for the intelligent you. Graham is very loyal, hence I’m unable to comprehend his vulnerability.”

“Ufufu…… What about your loyalty then?”

She threw a provocative look at him.

She raised her legs alternatively, causing the skirt of her dress to slip even more and revealing more of her dazzling white skin.

“Towards the precious princess…… It has already exceeded simple loyalty. I only know that I have to spare no effort for you. The value of my life is to consider Your Highness’ happiness. There is nothing other than that, this is my existence.”

“Is that so…… Then, Oswald.”

“Here.”

“I’m in a dilemma, which tea goes better with strawberry tart?”

“How about Darjeeling with honey?”

“It’s too sweet.”

“Even though the strawberry tart is sour?”

“Ufufu, true. It’s decided then, bring that out quickly.”

“The wind got stronger, you can’t afford to catch a cold. Isn’t it about time for you to return to your room?”

“Okay, I get it. Hey Oswald.”

“Yes?”

“I like Liz very much. She is a good girl.”

“Is that so?”

“Hence, when you bring back the corpse, I want to see her before you present her to Aunt Charlotte. Of course, that is before she rots. If it’s about this season, there shouldn’t be any problem. I believe bringing back Applewood’s pie shouldn’t be a problem too.”

"Understood."

Oswald bowed her head deeply and respectfully, as if she was the queen.

Margaret stood up.

She walked while swinging her silk dress, she went to the door that connected the room interior with the terrace.

* * *

Bastian ran in the forest with all his might.

When he was young, he felt fear from being chased by the P.E. teacher, though what he was experiencing now was on a different scale.

He ran until a river was seen.

It was fortunate that they escaped. As it was still April now, the river was cold.

It was even more fortunate that they escaped while Bastian carried her.

There was a brick mill along the river.

There was nobody in the mill as the door was open. Thus they could take a rest there.

The mill has brick walls and wooden roof. There was a complete set of equipment to process wheat inside. Although there were firewood on the stove, they could not use it without permission.

Bastian sat on an old chair.

“Haah… It’s been some time since I ran so seriously, so tired.”

“That, thank you very much for saving me.”

The girl who sat opposite of him lowered her head.

Bastian waved his hand lightly.

“Don’t mind it, didn’t Elise help me out countless times too? Ah, you’re Elizabeth now, right?”

“My real name is Elizabeth. Though it’s fine for you to call me what you like.”

“In that case, is it fine to continue calling you Elise?”

“Yes.”

The girl happily nodded her head.

“I was called Elise until this morning, now it feels nostalgic.”

“The silk dress suits you too.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“I feel that it’s not bad. Though the school uniform is better.”

After he said that, Bastian was afraid of being misunderstood, but Elise had a carefree smile floating on her face.

“Hehe…… I also feel that the school uniform is more relaxing. That reminds me, the countless times I help you, do you mean the times I helped you in school?”

“Yeah. I got entangled into those messes because I’m from Belgaria, how I wish I was from another country.”

“Even though you are so strong, why do you endure such treatment?”

“I promised my grandfather…… that I will return home if I’m involved in a fight.”

“How unexpected.”

“Ah!”

Bastian turned pale after mentioning the promise.

“Is anything wrong?”

“J-just now, that can’t be considered a fight, right? Not getting involved in a fight, not revealing my identity, no discussing about other countries’ politics and religion.”

“I believe that isn’t considered as a fight. By the way, not revealing your identity means that your identity as an earl’s son is a fake identity, right?”

“Ah, no. That..”

“Crimson eyed Bastian, based on what I know, only Belgariane royalty has crimson eyes.”

“I-is that so?”

Bastian took out glasses from his pocket. The lens were made specially from black crystal.

“W-why are you suddenly wearing sunglasses inside the room?”

“N-not good, my evil eyes seem to be going out of control. These divine glasses have the ability to suppress the magic.”

“So, are you the third prince, Heinrich Trois Bastian de Belgaria?

“I-I don’t know who is that.”

“I understand. I promise that I won’t tell anyone. No matter what your real identity is, you are my benefactor.”

“O-oh.”

“You said you came here to give me the manuscript you had written, did you break through the line of soldiers just to do so?”

“It’s true that I came here to pass you the manuscript, though saving a friend from soldiers is normal.”

“Friend……”

“Eh? Why the surprised look!? If I am that embarrassing to have as a friend, I will jump into that stream okay!?

“After I revealed myself as a princess, I thought that someone I can call a friend no longer exists. I’m glad now.”

“Haa, being a High Britannian royalty sure is tough.”

“I feel that it’s hard to approach Belgaria’s royalty.”

“What…… Eddie of the Balzac House, our relation is good and not strange at all. Same goes for that old man. That guy’s grandfather is very strong! Always wanting to teach swordsmanship.”

“I see, a Ducal house.”

“Ah! N-no…… Erm…… That was written in the newspaper.”

“Ah, yes yes, I understand.” Elise smiled.

Bastian then changed the topic.

“That reminds me, what is with that platoon? It seems to be High Britannia military, but for them to aim at the princess with guns…”

“This is the common internal dispute. Recently, this country's technology is advancing rapidly. Due to that, more and more people are supporting war.”

“Well, that’s normal.”

“Perhaps this thought might be normal for men, but I oppose a war. If there is a war, many people will die.”

“Well, it’s just that Belgaria has always been in a state of war since I was born, so I do not really understand what will happen if there is no war.”

“Don’t understand?”

“Ah, no, do you mean that it’s better that people don’t die?”

“Yes, it’s a war with Belgaria.”

“Ah?”

“I'm talking about High Britannia’s neighbour, Belgaria. Beyond the ocean, there is Hispania in the east.”

Bastian frowned.

“Is there something wrong with their head? Even if they have numerous new cannons, they won’t be able to win. This country’s soldiers lack experience…… And they intend to start a war with Belgaria that has been at war for hundreds of years?”

“If there is a chance for victory, they will start a war. Perhaps that is what the High Britannians are thinking?”

This was said in a timid voice.

Elise was not submissive like other girls..

“If there is a chance, they will attack. That’s how military men think.”

“For what purpose? A war will not make a country prosperous, conversely, there are much more benefits in deepening diplomatic ties.”

“Ah? I-is that so ?

Benefits that were better than war were things that High Britannia did not thought of. Elise nodded.

“For example, there are four villages, two of them are in a constant conflict while the other two are working together. Which of the two villages will be more wealthy?”

“The one that won the fight?”

“That might be so, but if a disaster occurred, are they going to ask help from the people they defeated?”

“Well, that won’t work. In fact, the defeated people will return the favour twofold.”

Elise nodded her head.

“Perhaps it is possible to gain benefits and wealth for a hundred years by winning a war. However, what about two, three hundred years later? Is it possible for the country to prosper forever?”

“Forever, is it?”

Bastian was not really aware of Belgaria’s history.

Though he was aware of one part of it.

The Empire existed for 851 years, there was once a period where half of the Empire’s territory was annexed by others, even the capital was captured.

“Although one should consider about the future, but can a human live that long?”

“As a ruler, one should not only think about his own happiness, but also the country’s future.”

“Ah, I see.”

That reminded Bastian of his court tutors who were also saying the same thing.

He often heard that as a ruler, one should prioritize the country's future than self.

"Because of such thoughts, I firmly oppose a war."

"I see, I see."

"However, within the country, support for a war is strong. The war faction will mostly likely crown my cousin, Margaret, as the queen."

"Does that girl want to start a war?"

Elise entered into deep thought.

"She……most likely, is fine with anything."

"What does that mean?"

"She passes each day being bored. As a duke's daughter and the first princess of High Britannia, coupled with gentle parents and outstanding subordinates, she is beautiful and healthy, and doesn't have any goals forced on her."

"How incredible."

"Precisely of that, it is very boring to her."

"If that's the case, why not go out and play?"

"As long as she is in High Britannia, she will get bored quickly, because her IQ is higher than average."

There was nobody similar to her even in Belgaria's royalty.

The first prince Auguste was sickly, while the second prince Latreille was busy with military affairs. The fourth princess Argentina, who has yet to come of age, was banished to a border fortress as the commander. The fifth child died soon after birth. Even the fifth princess Felicia, who was rising in the order of succession, has yet to venture out of her home due to her age.

Bastian himself, in a sense, might be similar to Margaret.

Rich and healthy

"I have similar feelings too."

"Is that so?"

"That reminds me, I once saw a weird guy in the military library—— He was reading the books with great drive."

"Does Bastian read too?"

"I was there because I flipped all the statues in the yard and was criticized by the chief steward, so I went to hide among the knights."

"……Ugh…"

* * *

During the spring two years ago,

Because of his red eyes, Bastian always wore sunglasses when he was outside of the palace. Even so, there was a chance of his identity being exposed.

Despite that, I removed my glasses and talked with that youth. “What’s so interesting about that book?”

“Hmm…… Nothing, I suppose.”

“Nothing!? Then why are you reading it? Isn’t it tiring?”

“The reason why I read books, is the same as the reason why you breath.

“Not breathing will be painful?”

“Yes, you’re right. I will be in pain if I don’t finish reading the book.”

“Are you sick?”

“I am told that quite often.”

“I hate reading the most. I prefer horse racing or practicing the sword.”

Bastian shrugged.

The young soldier took a few books from the pile on the table.

“This work tells a story about a super swordsman, his enemy includes a 100Co(44m) tall monster. It is a tense battle.”

“This too, the heroine uses magic, while the protagonist is a strong support. Though the male lead is a really tough man.”

“Are, are you talking about magic cult?”

“Ah? You do not know about the bestsellers in the Empire? Nobles around your age are buying these the most.”

“Is that so? I really hate books after all……”

“I also recommend this one…… No, perhaps this is a little extreme. The way he describes the battle is fabulous, but the girls’ clothing are a little thin.”

“What… is with this guy…… Well, whatever… A cool fight scene? Why don’t you lend me that?”

“Is that so? I’m glad that you like it. The author is the same age as you.”

“Eh!? Isn’t this written by an adult!?”

“The author? As the target audiences are towards youth, there are more young authors. Perhaps they just have similar mindsets or simply just childish adults.”

“Do you write too?”

“…… I was interested, but…… If I write, there won’t be enough time to read right?”

“Ah, I see.”

Bastian concentrated on reading the book.

It was an outstanding work.

Furthermore, it was written by someone the same age as him.

How Incredible—— That was his true thought.

“……If, you write a story…… and it becomes a bestseller in the future, there’s a chance that I might read it.”

The soldier was a handsome young man, who had a gentle smile.

Bastian hugged the borrowed book tightly.

At that moment, a soldier with black beard entered with loud footsteps.

He shouted while red in the face.

“Hey!! Regis Auric you bastard! Break time was over long ago! Are you going to make the Marquis wait for you!?”

“Ugh!”

He stood up quickly.

At the same time, at the door of the library, soldiers from the First Army, the strongest White Tiger Order, appeared in the library, which did not suit them.

The powerful knights pointed at Bastian.

“He’s here!”

Bastian then fled through the gap between the tables, smashed the windows and escaped outside. In his hand, he was holding the book……

* * *

After a short rest in the mill, Bastian moved into the forest with Elizabeth. They moved in the direction of the streets and reached Applewood by dusk.

“We didn’t lose our way.”

“Isn’t that normal? Considering my speed and I had memorized the map, it’s impossible to be lost. There isn’t much difference between this and dodging bullets.”

“Ah…… You’re weird, Bastian.”

“Really? Latreille can do it too. Ah, though Argentina is not good with directions. She is quite interesting as she can get lost in the forest.”

“That is normal.”

Bastian tilted his head upon hearing that.

Applewood was a fortress city that was surrounded by walls. A bustling city that was the biggest in the east.

Even when the sun set, the streets would still be filled with stalls, and the noises were similar to that of a festival.

The lives of the citizens here, even with the rapid advancement of technology, were no different from Belgaria.

As a precaution, Bastian wore his sunglasses. After all, there might be someone in this big city that knows about the features of Belgariane royalty.

Bastian who was beside her whispered in Elise’s ear, “…… There aren’t that many soldiers.”

His shoulder lightly bumped into Elise’s shoulder.

“Ah, not all soldiers are on Margaret's side, due to various reasons.”

“Although Margaret is the mastermind, but do you know who was the one that ordered it? After all, ordering an assassination of a royal who is named as successor sure is cruel.”

“I need to return to the capital.”

“Leave it to me. I will definitely bring you there, so trust me.”

“Thanks, Bastian.”

She has no idea when someone after her life might attack.

Because of that fear, she moved closer to Bastian.

Even when in the school’s dorm or the canteen, their shoulders were not as close as now.

Bastian has a mixed emotion of being proud and shy. At the same time, his desire to want to protect her intensified.

“I wonder if we can stay here.”

“I wonder if they accept students?”

“That reminds me, you can’t reveal yourself as a princess, right?”

“Yeah, it’s dangerous after all.”

They have considered visiting Applewood’s mayor, but they decided not to as they were unsure which side the mayor was on.

If he was on Margaret side, it was likely that he would call the army immediately.

They entered the shop before the sky darkened.

It was a building with white walls, the first floor being a bar while the second floor were the guestrooms. Both High Britannia and Belgaria have the same inn’s layout.

There were six men drinking at a table that was meant to seat four people.

At the counter, there was an old woman.

“What is it, this isn’t a place children should come.”

She uttered words of rejection.

How should we explain this? Bastian was stumped.

Elise walked to her and said, “Sorry to disturb, we are actually students and we are on our way back home to visit our sick relative. The carriage that our family arranged seems to be late…… Is it possible that we can stay here for a night?”

“Hmm……”

The old woman came out of the counter and surveyed them “…… Do you have money?”

“Ah, that……”

Bastian searched his pockets.

It was a futile search. Not just money, he did not have his stationery for studying.

“There’s only an old watch, a short sword and my future masterpiece. Oh no, no matter how I think, the thing with the most value is my masterpiece!”

“What about my handkerchief? It was something given by my mother, though I seldom use it. Anyway, I don’t think it’s cheap.”

The granny stretched her hand out.

Elise passed her the handkerchief.

The granny’s eyes changed after seeing that.

“Is this……silk?”

“If it is not enough, it’s fine, we'll go and find another shop.”

“Eh? Ahh…… Well, it can’t be helped, I’ll let you stay, though only breakfast and dinner will be provided.”

“Thank you.”

Elise lowered her head.

Bastian was relieved.

“That’s great, Elise!”

“Yes, Bastian. I really feel like sleeping after running around the whole day.”

The granny tilted her head.

“Erm, both of you are siblings, right?”

“Is it fine for it to be only one room?”

““Eh?””

Elise blushed, while Bastian scratched his head.

“It’s fine, I’m fine with being outside-”

“No! It’s cold outside. Granny, it’s fine even if there is only a room. We are siblings after all.”

“Is that so? Then, this is the key, it’s fine if you bring the key out. Well, it isn’t the time for children to go outside right now anyway. If you want dinner, it is best that you have it now as our stock is about to run out.”

“Yes!”

“I want to eat some meat.”

After finishing his words, the granny laughed.

“I don't think this suits the tastes of a young noble.”

Some bread and a thin soup with chicken was served.

Normally, one would drink beer to go with it, but they were still children, so water was served instead. The shelf life of beer was about one week while water would go bad after three days even during the cold season

And so, in a sense, warm potable water was more valuable than beer.

Bastian used the wooden utensils to eat

“Delicious!”

After finishing his novel overnight, he went to school without eating anything, hence he had gone without food for the entire day.

From him catching up with Elise to the intense battle in the forest, it was not surprising that he was hungry.

The hot soup filled his empty stomach and its light seasoning was appropriate for his thirsty tongue. “It’s really tasty, granny, I guarantee you that you’re fit to be Belgaria’s palace chef!”

“Haa…… Is that so? That was prepared by the old man.”

“It really is delicious.”

Elise was in a similar situation and tears formed at the corners of her eyes. Thinking about it, after she resolved to be the queen, abandoning her normal life and left the dorm, she was chased by soldiers who were after her life for the whole day and was showered with bullets.

Perhaps today's event has taken a toll on her—— Bastian thought.

“That’s right!? Granny, I want a second serving!”

“Wait, Bastian.”

“What, I’m not wasting it! It’s just another serving!”

“Ah, is that so?”

“Erm…… That…… Me too……”

Elise’s face redden as she hand over her utensils.

After finishing dinner, they went to the room.

After opening the door, both of them were petrified.

In the room, there were table and chairs, but there was only one bed.

“This…… is for one person?”

“There are two pillow, so probably for two…… two people… sleeping together here……” Elise’s face redden once more.

Suddenly, she went weak in her knees.

Bastian supported her shoulders in a panic.

“Hey, are you alright?”

“Noo!?”

Perhaps she was confused, Elise wriggled around, causing her to lose balance and fell on the bed.

It should be fine if he let go of her hand.

However, Bastian stretched his hand out.

In the end, it resulted in Elise’s back on the bed.

While Bastian was on top of her.

Her golden hair was disheveled against the gray bed sheet.

A fragrance that were mixed of sweat, dirt and soup were exuded.

Elise closed her eyes, trembling.

“You…… can’t……”

“O-oh no…”

“That, and…”

“Wait, please don’t be angry! I-I just lost control of my legs, I’m tired too!”

At this moment, a cough could be heard from the door.

The two separated in a hurry and looked towards the door.

The door was opened.

The granny who was at the door frowned.

“Fools! You should do those kinds of things behind closed door!”

“We are not doing anything!”

Elise groaned.

While Bastian shook his head, thinking that his face has reddened to the point that it could be his latest special skill.

That reminds me, what is she referring to?……

* * *

Their back touched each other as they were lying on the bed.

“Hyaah!?”

“Ah, sorry.”

“T-the bed sure is small.”

“Y-yeah.”

Their hearts were beating very fast as both were conscious of each other.

As both of them were exhausted, they fell into a deep sleep before they knew it.

The next morning,

Bastian and Elise were having their meal together on the first floor.

Although it was still early, there were people here having their meal.

Today's breakfast was toast, ham and egg.

Water was served too.

To commoners, this might be a little luxurious, but it was normal to nobles.

The two of them were from Belgaria’s royalty and High Britannia's royalty, they could ask for any kind of luxurious dishes.

Though both of them lack general knowledge.

Be it Bastian or Elise, both were unaccustomed to a commoner’s life, they only knew that a commoner and noble lives were different.

“Today’s food is delicious too, granny.”

“That’s what I think too, granny.”

“Fools! You don’t have to keep repeating it, just eat your food.”

Suddenly, someone opened the door with great momentum.

“Bad news!”

The man was wearing linen clothes. His right hand was holding the newspaper, while his left hand was holding a frying pan for some reason.

“Something big happened!”

“What happened, why all the fuss?”

“Her Majesty has passed away!”

The man raised the newspaper.

High Britannia’s Queen Charlotte Steelart has passed away, year 42, 15th April midnight.

The royal physician declared that Her Majesty has passed due to a heart disease.

The “Silent Week” of mourning would start on 16th.

The customers that were here for breakfast were surprised by that.

The granny began to pray.

Bastian looked at Elise, whose face and lips were pale.

“W-what should I do, Bastian?”

“Hey, stay strong!”

“If…… If that’s the case…… I…… couldn’t make it on time……”

“It’s different! Didn’t the knight said it yesterday, that this was unexpected.”

“Ah, yes…”

Their actions caused a slight commotion.

The customers who were in an uproar and the hotel’s granny looked at them in surprise.

Bastian hugged Elise’s shoulder to support her standing up.

“Are you able to walk?”

“Yes……”

If possible, Bastian wanted Elise to rest a little longer. Though it could not be helped as people were looking at them, it was not an optimal location to rest.

They moved towards the main streets from the hotel.

To be safe, Bastian wore his sunglasses as it would be troublesome if someone recognised him as a Belgaria’s royalty.

The bustle streets were filled with many small stalls and tourists.

Though that was a scene from yesterday——

“Her Majesty!?”

News of the death of the queen was spreading.

Some were holding newspaper in their hand, while some were crying.

The queen was the symbol of High Britannia, there were many citizens who were depressed as they lost their queen who was a motherly figure to them.

Does Elise feels the same as them?

“Uhh…… Her Majesty…… Aunt…… is a gentle person……”

This was usually not acceptable in public, but it was different today. Everywhere on the streets, one could observe similar scenes.

Not long after that, Elise calmed down.

Wiping her eyes which were red from crying, Elise said in a trembling voice.

“Sorry…… Bastian.”

“Have you calmed down already?”

“Yes.”

“You should groom yourself a little. You seem to be tired.”

“It’s fine.”

“The queen died at night on the 15th. Today is already the 16th.”

Bastian nodded.

Confirming that, Bastian continued,

“From now till the 22nd, should be the mourning period known as the Silent week, right?”

“Yes.”

“Then, the new queen will be decided on the 23rd?”

“That should be the case, the parliament will declare the new queen on the Dawn of the Declaration.”

“Elise, you are chosen as the successor, right?:

“Yes, take a look at this.” She stretched her left hand out. A golden ring engraved with the image of petal was on her ring finger.

“This flower is the symbol of royalty?”

“The white rose is High Britannia’s national flower. If I bring this to the capital, where there should be many people who oppose a war, I shouldn’t be ignored.”

“Of course. This is also Queen Charlotte’s wish.”

“…… However. If it’s now, there is a possibility that Margaret will become the new queen.”

“If I successfully returned to the capital, I will be hindrance to them.”

“Even with the ring, you can’t become the queen?”

“Yes, it’s another matter if the location of the one with the ring is known. If the candidate is missing, she will not be forgiven if others deem that she is being held for private reasons.”

“Is there any other way……”

It took half a day when using the train, five days for carriage. If it was on foot, they would not be able to make it even with full seven days.

Bastian sighed.

This journey sure is tough.

“It will be nice if the queen announced her candidate.”

“Perhaps that’s what she wanted to do, but she has been waiting as I’m still a student.”

“Ah, is that so?”

“However…… because the queen’s health wasn’t good, I was escorted back in a hurry. We should be able to make it in time if we use the train.”

The queen’s death happened yesterday.

If they set off from Applewood by train, it was likely that they would make it back in time.

“She probably told others about me, but with the key personnel gone, they couldn’t do anything.”

“Is that so?”

“Is it possible to use the train?”

“I think it’s impossible, though I want to take a look.”

Bastian and Elise walked towards the city central. The black smoke tells the location of the train station.

The metallic sound of wheels rotating.

Steam coming out of the exhaust.

Opposite of the fences was the majestic train.

And the soldiers guarding the station.

“So this city also realised that a war is starting soon.”

“This isn’t a time for jokes, Bastian. No matter how one looks, those are soldiers who were dispatched to find me.”

“I see.”

Bastian rescued Elise when she was surrounded by the soldiers at dusk yesterday.

The incident was reported to either some unknown person or princess Margaret, hence more soldiers were dispatched..

Their order, most likely, was to assassinate princess Elizabeth.

“Looks like the train is not an option. In any case, let’s try and find a carriage on the street.”

“That will be more appropriate.”

“Eh?”

Bastian looked at Elise who was in deep thought.

“……”

“What is it, do you need to use the toilet?”

“Huh!? How do you even reach that conclusion!?”

“S-sorry, looks like I’m wrong again.”

"…… Bastian…… From here on, there's no return, but it's still not too late for you to return to the academy."

Bastian tilted his head.

"What did you just say?"

"B-but, the situation now……"

"I already promised that I will definitely bring you to the capital."

"But this is dangerous, I believe you only came to give me your work."

"That is so, but if you die, then there won't be anyone reading my work anymore. This is more than enough reason to help you."

"I don't understand you, Bastian."

"Same here."

"Eh?"

"I'm similar to the person called Margaret. Every day is boring…… So this isn't for you, but for myself. So don't mind it, go ahead and exploit a weird person like me."

"I can't do that……"

"Ah, here!"

"Ah?"

Bastian grabbed Elise's hand and ran.

The main street was now filled with people and soldiers.

They ran to an alley.

"That was dangerous. We will probably be seen at the exit of the city."

"How can that be!"

They ran towards the gap between the buildings, but they were unlucky as they met some soldiers who were having their meal in the alley.

The opponents numbered three.

"H-hey…… Could it be that… she is princess Elizabeth!?"

"Stop!"

Another person blew a whistle.

The soldiers quickly gathered there.

Bastian grabbed her small hand and started running.

Bastian who has a keen hearing able to detect the armoured soldiers in the forest, was unable to utilise it in this alley.

The soldiers were moving quietly, with no sound of footsteps.

“We screwed up!”

“Bastian, hurry and escape!"

“Enough is enough, Elise! How can you, who is carrying the fate of the nation, act like this and worry about me!? Who will stop the war if you die!? To protect this peace, you have to live even if you have to eat mud!”

“Ah…”

She was reprimanded.

Though an apology would have to wait after they survived this.

They continued running in the alley.

Bastian was not sure how far they ran as he did not memorize the map.

A feeling of unease——

Most likely, they will catch up with us.

It’s like we are entering the centre of their encirclement instead of breaking out.

“Elise, keep running! Don’t look back! Don’t stop! I will definitely protect you!”

“I understand.”

Bastian let go of his hand, believing that she would continue to run.

He was attempting to break through the troops converging on them by force.

As the alley was narrow, the three soldiers were in a single file. They were surprised by Bastian’s sudden attack.

The enemy who were near the back of a noodle stall raised their guns.

“Y-you brat——”

Bastian took out a dagger. It was an old dagger.

He brought it along when he decided to study oversea.

It was an Emperor Sword.

It belongs to the Belgaria’s founding emperor, L’Empereur Flamme. Seven weapons were created using spirit silver that was granted by spirits themselves.

It was indeed a legendary weapon.

<Arme Victoire Volonte> belongs to the second prince Latreille, while Eddie, whose house have been dukes for generations, held <Defendre Sept>.

In addition, <Grand Tonnerre Quatre> was given to the fourth princess Argentina.

The first prince Auguste and the fifth princess Felicia was not given any, one of the reasons was them recuperating.

No matter what, Argentina who is younger than me also has it! Even I can be a commander! Probably… Bastian thought back then.

Hence, one day before leaving the country, he took it from the treasury.

Of course, it caused a commotion when it was discovered next day.

However, Bastian's father, who was the emperor of Belgaria said, "It was I who loaned it to him.", and ended the incident.

A long sword was not suitable to bring to school. While studying overseas, a dagger was a more convenient weapon.

The dagger was named Vite Espace Trois

The blade was placed on a beautifully designed scabbard, from its wide base to its point, it drew a long and narrow triangle. The blade's length was about 4 Pa(30cm), about the same size as L'Empereur Flamme's foot.

The double edged dagger was as thin as paper, and it was said that it could execute an action as fast as the speed of sound.

Bastian's right hand was holding the dagger.

He was in a good mood.

How incredible.

It feels like I can run faster than normal.

Bastian himself was also surprised when he ran to the enemy in one breath.

"Do not point your guns at your own country's princess, foolish soldiers!"

Before the gun could be fired, that arm was cut off.

It did not make a sound even as it cut through the wind.

When the soldier pulled his hand back, his whole arm was already severed.

The three witnessed the slash. Blood was spurt out from the stump. The soldier yelled in pain.

"Waaaah!?"

The gun dropped to the floor. Bastian immediately picked it up and fired it towards the three without any hesitation. "How is it!? Turn back if you don't want to die!"

That was High Britannia latest designed gun.

Reloading was easy and fast, the firepower was strong too. Even so, there was still a need to reload after each shot.

Hence Bastian threw it away after firing.

At the same time, he jumped up and continued attacking. He slashed at the enemy, stealing their loaded guns and fired.

Bastian aimed and fired at the back of the retreating soldiers—— This new type of gun had the firepower to even shoot through armour at close distance. Though the soldiers were weak.

"?"

Someone walked from the depths of the alley

And stopped before Bastian.

At this moment, Elise finally caught up.

"Ahah…… haa…… Bas…… ah."

As there was an enemy in front, she avoided calling his name.

The opponent was probably female.

Her black hair was cut neatly above her brow, sharp eyes and her lips were pursed together.

Wearing a High Britannia's officer uniform, she was lightly armoured, a long sword and pistol were hanging at her waist. In addition, a dagger was probably hidden on the inner side of her legs.

She placed her gun onto the ground.

The distance between them was at most ten steps. If she were to use the gun, Bastian would reach her first. The opponent most likely understood this.

Bastian broke into a grin.

"What is it, you're not going to use it? Perhaps you are someone who is confident about your own strength?"

"I am Lieutenant Glenda Graham of High Britannia Army First Division. May I know who you are?"

His back was trembling.

Bastian readjusted his sunglasses.

"Kukukuku……To the person who named herself, I'm the messenger of darkness, Chevallier Sombre! Have a taste of the power of darkness that resides in my right arm!"

"I see, a Belgariane is it?"

"W-wait… ! …… . I'm the dark knight! The dark knight!"

Glenda drew her sword from her waist.

That ordinary sword could be easily destroyed by Vite Espace Trois.

However, the whitish silver metal was made using High Britannia latest blacksmithing technology.

"Are you a foreigner that was bought by money? You shall regret it!"

She suddenly attacked after saying that.

Bastian clicked his tongue

Hey hey, she took the initiative? That seems like it. It has been a long while since I had an opponent like her. You've got to be kidding.

"I'm not afraid of death! If there's an enemy, I will fight!"

Bastian rushed towards Glenda's strike.

"What!?"

"Haaaa!"

Bastian thrust Vite Espace Trois. .

"Hn?"

Vite Espace Trois clashed with the longsword. However, that was just a part of a consecutive moves. At the same time the swords clashed, a total of three moves were executed. Sparks were created due to that.

An ear piercing sound was produced.

Glenda's armour cracked.

"Ah!? The new steel armour is!?"

"So you even place a guard there!"

Thanks to that, the cut was not that deep.

Glenda swung her sword, causing Bastian to take a step back, creating some distance between them.

"Ah!"

"Haaaa!"

Keeping his legs rooted onto the floor, he used the dagger and received the blow.

The pitch of metal colliding against each other was getting higher and higher.

The distance between their heads was slowly shortened.

Sight locking onto each other.

Bastian clenched his left hand into a fist.

A sound could be heard.

Bastian then punched at his opponent's abdomen with fist that was harder than stone. Glenda used her gauntlet to block Bastian's punch which has the power to suppress a bull, causing her to fly into the air.

"What!?"

"Sleep!"

While Glenda was in the air, Bastian sent a kick at her.

Glenda’s gauntlet cracked.

She used both of her hands to protect herself but was blown away as if she was jumping off a carriage. She was sent flying into a wall.

The wall collapsed after the impact.

Dust began to fly about.

Glenda could not be seen.

Should She be still able to stand? There isn’t time to find out.

“Let’s go, Elise!”

“Ah…… Okay.”

Bastian and Elise escaped from Applewood city.

Chapter 3: Stone Bridge

16th April, evening.

In one out of thirteen rooms that belongs to Margaret.

In front of the huge window that was facing the west, the rays of light from the setting sun shone upon the room.

There was cake and black tea on the table.

The maids stood near the wall, ready to serve.

The owner of the room was wrapped in a fur coat that was larger than the bed.

As she was wearing a skimpy silk dress, her chest and thighs were exposed.

Under the setting sun, her body was dyed red, as if she was enveloped in flames.

It was like she was drenched in blood

Be it her black hair or her amber coloured eyes.

“So, is there any interesting things written in there?”

“My apologies, there is nothing in this report that could be of interest to the elegant princess Margaret.”

Oswald held the report behind him and lowered his head.

Margaret repeatedly curved her index finger, the closest maid then walked to her.

The maid carried a basket of roses over.

“Then, I wonder if Liz was found.”

“…… My sincere apologies…… Although she appeared in Applewood, she escaped in the end.”

“Ara ara, Liz sure is fast. Or could it be you not having the intention to catch her, hence letting her off?”

“Something like that is…”

“I like men who are gentle~”

“To eliminate anyone who is harmful to Your Highness is my raison d'etre. Hence, it is impossible for me to have any pity for princess Elizabeth.”

“Ara, what a shame. I feel sorry for Liz who is quite unfortunate. Which is why I chose the roses.”

All the roses in the basket that the maid held were dyed red by the setting sun.

But the finer details could not be seen clearly.

It was no exaggeration to say that in this room, only Margaret knew the reason why roses were chosen in this kind of situation.

Oswald did not ask for any clarification.

The more he ask, the more confused he would get.

“It happened this morning. A soldier noticed a girl that looks like Elizabeth in Applewood. However, she escaped with the aid of a boy who is traveling with her.”

“It’s different from what I thought. If it’s a play, she would be captured immediately, following that would be our reunion. Two sisters who are close, turned into enemies. In a play, there should be a scene in which both us part ways. In that play, the main female lead will be someone who is skilled enough to excite the audience.”

“It is as you said.”

“But…… it’s a shame that it’s not like a play …… That reminds me, it seems that Glenda also went to Applewood.”

“It is as you said, Lieutenant also joined the fight…… but was wounded by the boy that was mentioned earlier.”

“Ara ara, how disappointing.”

That boy seems to be quite skilled——

Who is he exactly? Oswald thought.

Even in the army, Glenda was one of the best. To actually suppressed her in a one-on-one duel.

Moreover, the weapon used was just a dagger.

From the report, it was likely that he was a Belgariane.

Even if he was the elite of the Empire’s army, Oswald was not agreeable with the existence of people stronger than Glenda.

For this war, he gathered information prudently.

New guns, cannons and equipment like swords and guns were made from the new metal. Hence the gap between their equipment should help to boost the probability of victory.

That was what Oswald concluded.

Moreover, they also sold these new weapons to the Grand Duchy of Varden and neighbouring countries. This was not simply for funds.

The practical result was also confirmed.

That was precisely why there was a need to investigate who that young boy was——

Exactly who is protecting princess Elizabeth?

Margaret squinted at the roses which were letting out an aroma.

“How annoying…… Failure upon failure. Failure upon failure, how great, really put me in a good mood.”

“Thanks to Your Highness’ tolerance, this humble servant won’t have to endure shame, however, please grant an me a little more time.”

“I wonder whether Liz will come here.”

“I highly doubt so. Not just Applewood, all of the stations and trains are under strict observation.”

On the surface, it was to keep in check the rebels who might move when the news of the death of the queen spread.

Although the distance between Applewood and the capital was only 100ml(160km), there were dense forests and mountains between them. It would take five days to reach here using a carriage. Moreover, I sent men to various checkpoints. Hence it is not possible for them to reach here.”

“It will be tiring if they walk here.”

“It is as you said.”

Oswald calculated——

If they travelled via the forest, it was impossible for them to reach here within seven days.

Although Elizabeth was outside of his expectation, the plan was still proceeding smoothly as queen Charlotte died earlier than expected.

Furthermore, Glenda only has minor injuries. Glenda would be summoned back, but the knights working under her doesn’t matter, they will be reassigned to hunt princess Elizabeth down . If the boy was settled, the assassination of princess Elizabeth would be far more simple.

Margaret pressed the rose against her lips.

Her tongue licked the rose as if she was licking a wine bottle.

“So Liz is not coming? And I was still thinking about a reunion.”

“Regarding the reunion, I believe it will happen on the Dawn of Declaration when Your Highness Margaret becomes the queen…… at the state funeral.”

The queen Charlotte’s funeral would happened on the last day of the Silent Week. The new queen would be coronated the next day.

In other words, before the crowning of the new queen, the funeral of the previous queen must take place.

Oswald gave a deep bow.

Margaret used her lips to pick a rose up.

“Take it.”

“… This is…… a great honour.”

Using a single hand to accept something from a noble was unacceptable.

Oswald put the report on the floor, one knee on the floor and both hand opened.

The rose was put on top of his hands.

Margaret's line of sight shift to the report on the floor.

"Fufufu…… So the capturing of Liz is a failure."

"It is as what the report says."

"Looks like punishment should be mete out to the one who failed, what shall I do?"

"It's up to your decision."

"Then a death sentence."

"…… Death sentence is it?"

"Fufufu… Yes, a death sentence is good."

"I can only feel admiration to the decision made by the clever princess Margaret. It is certain that the High Britannia army will be involved in a war few days later—— If one simply neglects the failure of capturing just a girl, victory will not be obtained even with countless preparations. Using the life of someone responsible and meting out punishment will serve as a good warning to the army."

"Yes, isn't that good?"

Margaret picked another rose from the basket that the maid was holding.

And plucked out the petals, letting it fall onto the tea.

Red coloured flower and red coloured tea.

She drank the red liquid which was dyed red by the setting sun.

16th April, morning——

No carriage was available.

Bastian and Elise who escaped from Applewood was heading towards the forest.

However, it was impossible for them to reach the capital before the morning on 23rd April.

There were no other methods other than the carriage either.

They were taking a break under a tree, a distance away from the city before entering the forest.

If there was a carriage passing by, they could negotiate with the driver.

If it was pursuers, they would continue to hide here.

If it was in the forest, Bastian could make use of his hearing, so it was safer than the city.

Elizabeth looked at the map that was drawn on the floor, while Bastian sighed.

"It's far. Even if we managed to get a carriage, they will be guarding the checkpoints."

“It’s also dangerous in large cities.”

Elise nodded.

“If that’s the case, we can alight somewhere near those locations, though it will get harder to avoid the streets as we get closer to the capital.”

“…… That’s true.”

Looking at the map, Elise made a difficult expression.

However, the resolve to protect her country was not shaken at all.

That being said, it would be troublesome if they were surrounded by enemies in an open area. No matter how fast they could run, it would be useless if they were attacked from all sides.

Do we really need to travel on foot all the way to the capital?

Elise pointed at the map.

The area was a place southeast of the capital.

“I wish to go here.”

“Is there anything there?”

“The Gray Bridge fort is there。 The commander, Bruno Carlo, is my father’s younger brother. In other words, my uncle.”

“I see…… However, is it really okay to believe him just because he is your relative? In my house, the second brother is someone capable of poisoning the eldest son and sending our younger sister to the frontline.”

“And so the third son escaped oversea?”

“That is so.”

“What an incredible Earl horse.”

Ahh—— Bastian quickly used his hand to cover his mouth.

Still, it’s fine……. it’s half and half, truth and lies were mixed inside.

Considering Elise’s knowledge, she should have a clear grasp of Belgaria’s affairs. Anyway, she is already aware of it.

Compared to that, the important thing is——

“Is it really fine to trust him? That commander?”

“As he is from a militaristic family, he became the substitute for the eldest son, hence Bruno Carlo joined the military. The eldest son is my father…my diplomat father married my mother who is from the royal family.”

“I see.”

The more amazing someone was during negotiation, the reaction from others would be different.

For those related to royalty, instead of being a soldier, their performance as a diplomat would be valued more greatly.

In the future, maybe Bastian would request to be a diplomat in Belgaria.

“I don’t really like diplomatic missions.”

“But your use of the High Britannia language isn’t too bad.”

“That’s because I’m someone who is going to write a masterpiece!”

“I see, so it seems that your mother tongue still have a long way to go .”

“That’s not it, it’s just a little bad, probably.”

“Although my power is limited, I will fully support you.”

Elise said so with a smile.

Bastian who felt embarrassed lowered his head

“Uncle Bruno Carlo’s patriotism had been praised by queen Charlotte that if he was 10 years younger, she would recommend him to join the imperial knight. Even though he is a soldier, he is a pacifist. The distance between the capital and the fort is one day of travel. If he dispatch soldiers to escort us, we should be able to make it on time.”

Bastian assessed her words a little.

True, with only me protecting her all the way is a little tough. If there is someone we can rely on and is not far from the capital, if he has the soldiers, we can really reach the capital safely.

“Looks like there’s no other choice…… I only pray that your uncle is trustworthy.”

“Although he’s already fifty, his body and heart is still healthy. I believe he will help us.”

“I get it, since you already said it that way. Then, let’s proceed to that fort.”

After the discussion, they harvested some aralia in the forest near the road while waiting for a carriage.

Although salt was required to cook this properly…… It could be eaten directly. It just would not taste nice.

Although he could not let Elise eat these kind of wild sprouts, Bastian was taught by his grandfather when they went for a hike.

If there’re a few more days to spare, I would really cross the forest to reach the capital.

The road during the morning was different than when it was during dawn.

Just as they were getting impatient——

A wagon that was pulled by two horses was moving towards their direction.

On the driver seat was a man with beard.

There were no guards at all. Perhaps the goods in the wagon was not much, or that the driver was confident of his own strength.

Whatever is fine, Bastian revealed himself.

“Excuse me!”

“Ah!? Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!”

Seeing someone that looked like a student appearing from the shadow, the driver stopped while being cautious.

Bastian ran towards him and lowered his head.

“Can you do us a favor!? We need to rush to Gray Bridge Fort! Please allow us to travel together with you!”

“Gray Bridge Fort is it? Although we will pass by cities on the way to that fort… “

The man said so with a heavy accent.

“Ohh!”

Bastian clasped his hand together and raised it.

His knowledge of the geography of this region was based on the map drawn on the floor, but as long as they hitch this carriage who was going towards that direction, they could try their luck.

“Please.”

Elise also lowered her head.

The driver rubbed his beard.

And narrowed his brows.

“Please move aside, you need a carriage desperately right? Then there should be some available in Applewood.”

“T-that……”

Bastian stepped forward to replace Elise in speaking.

He whispered into Elise’s ear.

“… Leave it to me… I have an idea.”

“… That will be a great help.”

Bastian straighten his back

And faced the driver.

“We are Holy knights, fighting against the knights of darkness. However, due to an evil warlock, we were thrown out here. If we do not return to the fort quickly, this country will be doomed. You should help us out.”

Elise knocked him away with a violently.

“Ha!”

“Uwaa!?”

As Bastian was not aware Elise coming, he fell flat to the ground.

Keke, Elise coughed a little.

The driver gave them a strange look.

“…… The Holy…… what?”

“My apologies. This person here has the habit of weaving stories… but, he, he is someone important to me.”

Elise’s face redden.

“… A-actually… we, are in the midst of eloping!”

“What——!?”

Elise kicked Bastian’s shin as he yelled and attempted to stand.

“This fool isn’t that promising, even I’m not clear about myself… But him as a student, and I, who is a daughter of a noble… fell in, l-lo… that… l-lo…”

“So you two fell in love?”

In response to the driver’s words, Elise nodded her head.

“That’s what happened… but my father does not allow me to be with an Earl with terrible personality.”

“Hmm… Ahh, things are very suspicious recently, the nobles are also problematic.”

“At Gray Bridge Fort, I can rely on my uncle. No matter what, please allow us to travel together!?”

Elise pleaded.

The driver fell into thoughts while rubbing his beard.

Elise looked at him with a serious gaze

Be it elopement or engagement, she has already resorted to these excuses.

However, her resolve to follow him all the way was real.

Her being so desperate was not just for herself, but also for her country’s future. Bastian also thought that way

While squatting down, their eyes were focused on the driver.

The driver rubbed his beard while pointing behind, towards Applewood.

“Hu…”

“I-is that a no?”

“Get in the wagon behind. If a noble boy and girl are to sit at the driver seat, it will be eye-catching.”

“Thank you very much!”

Elise bowed deeply.

On the other hand, Bastian was wondering if he had ever receive such gratitude before.

That night, they slept in the open besides the wagon.

Though they couldn't guess the driver's age because of his beard, he was probably in the business of transporting cargo for quite a long time as he was accustomed to traveling.

“An inn? If you stay at that place your earnings will disappear. As for the bonfire, it's troublesome to take care of the fire, so it's best to just sleep at night”

They ate preserved food for dinner, the driver drank alcohol but, he gave the teens the same water as the horses. It was water drawn from the river, but they had no place to ask for luxuries.

He also kindly lent them cloths to protect them from the cold.

Bastian wrapped himself with the stiff cloth and lied down under the tree.

Next to him, Elise was doing the same.

The driver slept under the wagon's hood.

“The stars…”

“……What’s wrong? ”

“…In the past, I got angry and ran away from the grand chamberlain and went into the mountain. I didn't go back even after night falls. At that moment, I looked at the sky just like this. ”

The night sky could be seen in between the vegetation, it seemed possible to reach the glittering stars with their hands.

Elise changed her posture.

It could be heard the sound of the cloth rubbing.

“… I … I never looked up at the sky like this before.”

“I see…”

He suddenly looked at the side.

The glimpse of the side of the girl's face bathed in the moonlight was very sublime.

Bastian muttered unconsciously.

“Beautiful…”

“…. The stars are so pretty at night.”

“Ah!…Yeah…”

“Hmm?”

Elise looked at him.

Bastian feeling embarrassed turned his back.

“I… I talk a lot when the starry sky is beautiful… Well, let's sleep, we could get a lift on a wagon but we can't be unprepared.”

“Okay.”

Soon, the breathing of sleeping people could be heard.

For only a little today, they took time before they slept.

On the 17th, it started raining since dusk.

The driver prepared a place for them to sleep on the wagon.

Although the goods would be drenched if left outside, he said that it would be troublesome to catch a cold instead.

On the 18th, it kept raining.

A carriage wheel came rolling towards them on the road.

Although the other party was shouting to stop the wheel… Bastian actually chased after the wheel and got it back.

April 19th, they encountered soldiers who were doing checks.

Bastian grabbed Elise and escaped from the wagon without being noticed by the soldiers.

They hid in the forest to avoid the check.

They thought they won’t see the wagon again, but the bearded driver was waiting for them ahead.

April 20th, the sky finally cleared up.

Even though it was spring now, it felt like summer.

Gray Bridge Fort was located on the side of a rocky mountain. Although the steep slope was not so elevated that climbing was impossible. It was possible to use siege weapons and cavalry only on the rather flimsy platform halfway up the hill

At the foot of the mountain was a vast city.

Two different streams looked as if they were engraved onto the mountain. Because of the recent rain, the volume of water was more than usual, letting out a sound as if flow down the mountain.

Under the effect of the setting sun, shadows were pulled as if they were indicating the direction of the road from east to west.

Walking out of the forest, they could no longer hear the sound of water flowing.

At the entrance of the pathway stood an enormous stone bridge.

It was a rather old bridge, but it made people feel at ease.

The driver pointed at it.

“This gray bridge is the origin of this city’s name.

“I see. So that’s the Gray Bridge…… It seems usable.”

Seeing Bastian who seemed to have thought of a new special technique, Elise had a helpless look.

“Are you still fantasizing?”

“For the future masterpiece, normal way of thinking is not required.”

“Although nothing much happened since Applewood, but we still need to be cautious.”

“Leave it to me, I’ll protect you.”

“Ah… er… I’m not talking about that. I mean you, Bastian, please don’t get hurt.”

“Hm? Ah, okay.”

Bastian did not seem to be too concerned about it.

Although nothing much happened, there was still the probability of getting injured in the future.

The wagon went past the bridge as the wheels rattled.

Bastian and Elise who were in the wagon were looking around from the inside.

Although there were people in armour that looked like mercenaries.

There were no soldiers in High Britannia uniform.

It seemed that they have yet to catch up.

Gray Bridge City was very disorganised. There were several small roads extending out from the town square, but there was not a single road that could be called as the main road.

The black flag that was hung was the evidence of the Silent Week mourning.

If it was the capital, most shops would have closed. However, it was not so for cities that were further away.

Stalls were set up disorderly on the narrow road as customers walked while avoiding one another.

“It feels quite messy here.”

“That’s rude, Bastian.”

“What is going on around here? It feels like there was a war here. Merchants are gathering together as if this is a busy market. Although it’s a lively city, it’s quite chaotic.”

“Heeh.”

Elise added, “Because Gray Bridge city is in between the two river. Furthermore, there are mines over there and the precious metals dug up are made into ornaments.”

“So it seems that the ornaments here are quite popular.”

“That is so.”

During parties in the palace, the noblewomen often talked about jewelry.

Maybe they mentioned this city by name before.

Knowing the reason what the city was famous for, they were charmed for some reason upon looking at the bustling street.

The driver stopped at one corner of the town square.

“It’s great that you two are fine.”

This was the first time they saw him smile.

Bastian and Elise alighted from the wagon and bowed deeply.

“I’ll also thanks you on behalf of my uncle.”

“It’s fine, it’s fine… It is great that lovers can stay together. Take care.”

“Ah……”

Elise who lied had a sad face, just as she was about to say something,

Bastian stretched his hand out and stopped her.

The driver swung the reins and the wagon that accompanied them for five days just left like this.

The rattling of the wheels blended with the noisy streets.

Eventually, it disappeared into the shadow of a building.

“There’s no need to brood over this.”

“Yes, I understand.”

Raising their head, they could see the fort on the mountain.

It was not inferior to the bridge in terms of age and sturdiness.

Subconsciously, Bastian began wondering about ways to attack the fort but he shook his head to push away those thoughts.

From the foot of the mountain to the fort, it was quite a distance away.

Bastian looked for his pocket watch.

“I wonder if we can reach before dinner…”

“If you’re hungry, it’s fine if you look for food here.”

“But we don’t have any money. Unless you are going to sell off your dress after the handkerchief.”

Elise’s face redden.

“You’re shameless, Bastian!?”

“I’m just joking. Hm? Huh?”

“What is it?”

“Well…… My watch…… seems to be missing……”

“Eh!?”

No matter how he search, he could not find the watch he brought from Belgaria.

Haa, Bastian sighed.

He was sure that he took it with him as they left Applewood.

During those days, he did not ran around, neither did he stay in any cities.

Even the people he came in contact with were countable.

Elise looked depressed.

Bastian tilted his head, took out his sunglasses and wore it.

He then laughed.

“Well, it probably dropped on the way here.”

“Eh?…”

“What?”

A smile appeared on Elise’s depressed face.

“Nothing, so you actually have this kind of image……”

“Well, Let’s go quickly! I would like to eat something warm today!”

“Fufu… That’s right.”

Bastian stretched his hand out and held Elise’s hand.

With their hands together, they continued to walk towards Gray Bridge Fort.

* * *

A few days before Bastian and Elise reached the fort

This happened on the night of the 19th.

“Pardon me."

With her forehead wrapped in bandage, Glenda gave a bow..

This was Oswald's office in the capital.

Books and data were lined neatly on one side of the wall. In addition, there was a large work desk.

In the middle of the room was a conference table that was used for strategic discussion.

On the table was two map, one of the map was of High Britannia's neighbours and another was of its own territory.

The owner of the room, Oswald, was standing beside the table.

A girl in a dress used that table as a chair

Princess Margaret.

Although there was no sofa and such, there was a leather chair in front of the work desk. However, she chose to sit on the hard conference table instead.

She also sat on the map.

Leaving aside the table, beside the walls were Margaret's maids.

The attire they wore today was the normal maid clothing.

The maids shifted their sight to the person who just entered.

Even though they were of the same gender, the maids have a strange feeling considering that Glenda wore an armour that produced a grinding sound.

Even in the capital, Glenda was still wearing armour.

She then gave a bow as per normal.

"Lieutenant Glenda Graham reporting."

"You did a good job."

Just like always, Oswald's subordinates were polite, not even once were they rude.

Margaret looked over happily.

Although she was not that tall and was sitting down, sitting on the table causes her line of sight to match Oswald.

"Ara ara, what is going on, Oswald."

"What is it, benevolent princess Margaret."

"Glenda is right here."

"That's because this minor servant has a new mission for her, hence I summoned her back from Applewood."

“Fufufu…… I remember saying that it would be death sentence for those who failed their mission. How weird, what is going on here~”

She seemed to be in a good mood.

Having this kind of unexpected situation made her happy as she always get whatever she want. It was boring when things always go the way as she wants, hence she wanted something to stimulate her.

Margaret stared at Glenda. Her beautiful amber eyes looked as if they were giving off light.

It was beautiful indeed…… However, that look of her was scary at the same time.

Glenda was ranked within the top ten in High Britannia army. She was a courageous knight, yet she could not hide nervousness.

Princess Margaret was not simply a princess.

Be it a soldier or a citizen, none had her level of authority.

Even if she ascended and become the queen, she could not simply punish a soldier or a citizen on a whim.

For a punishment to be meted out, it need to be recognised by the senate. If more than twenty-four out of thirty people in the parliament objected, the queen’s order would be void.

Normally, that would be the case.

That said, Margaret was special. Her orders would become reality. Oswald was just a colonel, over that rank would be major general, lieutenant general and general. None of the staff officer in the capital’s Headquarters were present.

However, his authority could affect the entire High Britannia army.

Margaret reviewed her situation.

She was looking forward what Oswald might say. That high ranking officer with the gift of the gab was unusually quiet right now.

Glenda gulped.

And lowered her head.

“M-my sincere apologies!”

“Why are you apologising? Is it for letting Liz escape at Applewood, or for not being able to track Liz’s shadow? Perhaps you are apologising that you were born?”

“Uh…”

“You can’t do that, Glenda. You have such a beautiful face, so don’t make that scary expression.”

“Ugh…… I will capture the boy who was with Elizabeth to atone for my mistakes.”

“Ara, you don’t have to mind about it. Compared to that, how I wish that I can meet Liz earlier.”

“… I understand.” At this moment, Oswald finally joined the conversation.

“Oh gentle princess Margaret, please allow this minor officer to give a detailed report about the death penalty.”

“Fufu… Let’s hear it. It’s fine even if you care more about your subordinates more than me.”

“How could that be. The execution was carried out against the one person responsible to serve as a warning for the entire army.

“Ara ara, how incredible, what actually happened?”

“Although the wise princess Margaret already knew, allow this minor officer to add on…… The commander for Applewood isn’t Glenda, she was just a lieutenant while the commander was a lieutenant colonel.”

Ahh—— Margaret nodded.

It was as if she also enjoyed it.

“What a shame that you avoided that. I wanted to see you with a troubled face…… Looks like my effort was wasted.”

“Minor officers like her are just like the stones along the road. There is no need for the great princess Margaret to pay attention to such person.”

Margaret shrugged and called the maid who was beside the wall.

The maid brought a cup to her.

Oswald entered into the main topic.

“Lieutenant, compile the soldiers’ reports. I believe princess Elizabeth will not come here directly.”

“Yes!”

Glenda straighten her body and nodded.

She recovered back to original state.

“Princess Elizabeth has to return here before the 23rd morning, that is something everyone knows. Since she can’t use the train, the only option is the carriage. Even if that’s the case, there are still some limits… “

He traced his finger on the map.

Oswald’s sight was on a certain location on the conference table.

Margaret was sitting on the map, drinking black tea elegantly.

However, Oswald continued to say as if nothing happened.

“…… That limit is breaking through the capital’s encirclement. it is something that a sole boy is unable to do.”

Glenda was quietly listening while not moving at all.

Margaret complained that it was a little warm, causing the maid to keep apologising.

I see —— Suddenly, Margaret asked a question.

“Hey, Oswald.”

“What is your order?”

Even though it was sudden, his reply was immediate.

“Will Liz really go there?”

Oswald’s sight fell onto the place where she was sitting.

“Based on my conjecture… I believe they are heading towards Gray Bridge Fort.”

According to the reports, Elizabeth’s network and her geographical knowledge.

Considering all these, there was no other places they could go.

Normally, they would give up on returning and escaped. The possibility of her relying on the boy and escaped to Belgaria was not nil…… But she was not someone who would do that. Otherwise, she would not risk herself and appeared in Applewood city.

“Gray Bridge Fort?”

“That’s right.”

“Fufufu…… In other words, it’s quite near here.”

Margaret repositioned her legs seductively.

One could almost see inside the short dress.

Oswald was expressionless.

While Glenda froze on the spot.

In between the high quality dress and her snow-white legs was the map showing the area around the capital Queen’s Tower.

Towards Oswald who did not show any expression, Margaret looked upwards.

“Fufufu…… Gray Bridge, I wonder where is it at~”

“As per the noble princess Margaret’s question, Gray Bridge fort is over here.”

Oswald pointed at the map with his index finger without any hesitation.

His finger could somewhat felt Margaret’s temperature.

It looked as if the finger was inside of her dress.

Margaret raised a nasal voice.

“Ah…… It’s closer than I expected.”

“Although one cannot travel via train to there, a carriage will take one day to reach. Travelling on foot requires five days.”

“So… Glenda will be dispatch to there?”

“That’s right. Furthermore, a musketeer squad will be dispatch. If necessary, they can aid in capturing princess Elizabeth alive.”

“Sure~”

“Towards the magnanimous you, I will not disappoint you any further. Please wait for the good news.”

“Fufu… I hope you keep your promise.”

“Yes.”

For a moment, he was at a loss for words.

Margaret stretched out his hand, touching Oswald’s cheeks.

A warm smile appeared on her face.

“I want to go there too. I had enough staying in this boring place.”

“I understand… Everything will be as you wished.”

As his face was held by Margaret, Oswald could only reply with words as his body and head could not move.

Not noticing when, Margaret released his head..

Margaret jumped from the conference table elegantly, causing the dress to flutter.

The maids were still like statues all this time, and just started to react when Margaret started to move.

She was like a wild cat, agile and lively.

“That’s great, Liz, that’s great. I’m so happy for you. What shall I do, which dress shall I wear? Which one, I wonder? I can’t present myself negligently.”

The maids followed Margaret and left the office. The room finally returned back to the usual atmosphere and quietness.

Oswald rubbed his forehead with his finger and sighed.

He looked at Glenda, who was red in the face and ears.

Although Glenda was older than him…

It was cruel to compare him and her that way.

“…… Just leave this to the musketeer squad and Margaret’s guards.”

Oswald gave out the paper orders that he already prepared.

Glenda opened her eyes wide.

“Eh!? Could it be that your Excellency thought this might happen?”

Although it was a little arrogant, she was not wrong.

Oswald shrugged his shoulders.

“Only fools will fail to bring an umbrella just because it’s not raining.”

Chapter 4: The Burning Tower

Setting off from the city which was located at the foothill, they spent about two hours to reach Gray Bridge Fort before dusk.

What should we do if we got rejected at the gate—— they harboured such worries, but it was fortunate that the fort commander was Elise's uncle. Moreover, Elise visited here a few times before, hence the gate guard recognised Elise.

Bastian and Elise entered the fort.

The guard welcomed Bastian and Elise and also expressed his condolences for the death of the queen before continuing leading them through the stone corridor.

Gray Bridge Fort was built on the southern area of the mountain.

Behind it were the mountains, in front of it was a mountain slope.

The left and right side of the fort were rivers.

The surface of the rock was eroded by the river, resulting in a valley which height was immeasurable.

Over there was a stone bridge.

In other words, to climb the mountain which the fort was on, they eventually have to cross the bridge. It was a good position to prevent enemy attacking.

The mountaintop behind it was covered in snow, trying to overcome it would be tough.

There should be other ways other than ascending the mountain, Bastian thought.

Looking at the size of the castle, there should be around one thousand to one thousand and five hundred people inside. It looks really tough to siege it.

Elise spoke while Bastian was still observing the area.

"Is this kind of castle rare, Bastian?"

"No."

"Is there something special about it?"

"No, it's just that when I see a fort or such, I will always think of ways to attack it."

"One normally doesn't consider those kind of things."

"I-is that so?"

The buildings inside the city were divided into two types: Half of it were caves dug out of the cliff, to be used by soldiers. The other half were built out of bricks, such as the towers.

There was usually only one tower used as observation post for Belgaria's forts. However, the forts in High Britannia have four towers.

There are many towers in High Britannia's forts and cities, even the capital is full of towers. Why is that so?

While Bastian was pondering about it, they were brought to one of the four towers which have a moderate height.

Inside the tower was a simple room, having only plain wooden tables and chairs.

The man sitting inside the room stood up, looking over to their direction while smiling.

"It's great that you are fine…… Elizabeth."

"Uncle!"

Elise ran over emotionally.

The man also ran towards Elise and finally able to properly say the words he wanted to, "It's great that you reached here without any problem."

Bruno Carlos Victoria was already fifty year old.

He was dressed in black, possibly it was still the mourning period, causing him to look like a cultist. This way of dressing could be considered simple to a marquis or a colonel.

As Elise was relieved, tears began to form at the corners of her eyes.

As Bruno Carlos was concerned about Elise, he almost cried too.

This scene moved Bastian's heart, almost causing him to cry.

"Sniff… Well, we can finally take a break here."

"This is all thanks to you."

"That's not it. It's because of the effort you put in, all I did was just give you a hand."

"Even if that's the case. If it weren't for you, I…"

"I understand. Please read my masterpiece after you reach Queen's Tower, you must remember to give me your feedback after reading it!"

"Ahh, of course."

Elise smiled after wiping her tears away.

Bruno Carlos stretched out his right hand

In response, Bastian shook his hand.

That hand belonged to someone who trained every day. It was full of strength, totally unlike a hand of someone who was fifty.

"I do not know how to thank you…… I'm grateful that you helped Elise, I do not know what else to say."

"I'm not used to someone thanking me…… Well, we have yet to reach the capital. I believe this is just the beginning."

“Yes…… That’s right…… Regarding that point…… I have something to say to you.”

“Hm?”

“It’s important.”

“I understand.”

Bastian nodded and let go of his hand.

Bruno Carlos turned towards Elise.

“Elizabeth, can you go to the dining hall first? The soldier here will lead you there. I have something to discuss with Bastian.”

Bastian said “it’s fine, why don’t you go off first.” towards Elise who looked uneasy.
What is it that he want to say? Please hurry up, I wanted to have dinner with Elise, Bastian thought.

Elise opened the door and left the room.

“See you later, Bastian.”

“Ooh!”

Elise said those words to Bastian before leaving.

“So, what is it that you want to talk about?”

“You’re a Belgariane, right?”

Bruno Carlos cut to the chase immediately.

Bastian shook his head.

“Haa, looks like I got exposed.”

Even though he was wearing sunglasses to hide his face, others could guess he was a Belgariane from his name alone.

Moreover, the High Britannia language he used had a Belgaria accent.

Although both sounds similar, there were differences.

Looks like I still have a long way to go as I failed to master High Britannia language, Bastian thought.

“You are a hot topic in the army. Even if the civilians doesn’t know, this has spread between the soldiers.”

“Ahh, I see.”

After all, he defeated a female knight named Glenda easily.

Bruno Carlos shook his head and had a troubled look.

“I… also wished to respect Elizabeth’s friend, but what will the soldiers think of this instead?”

“How will they think……”

“The call for war is gaining momentum as people think that a war will improve our lives and that the slow economy will also improve.

“Is that so? Are there no one out there who oppose war?…… Benefits and such, they will only know when a war start.”

“I oppose war.”

“If you aren’t, it will be headache for me, really!”

If Bruno Carlos changed his mind now, that would be a huge problem.

“Queen Charlotte often bring this topic up, comparing it with a village that is often in conflict while another village that kept on fanning the fire of conflict.”

“Ah, Elise also mentioned it before! So she actually learned it from the queen.”

“This is something the pacifists in this country agreed on.”

“I can understand. It’s fine. Although Belgaria is constantly at war, I believe that it’s better without any war.”

However, Bastian remembered that Latreille believed war was necessary for Belgaria.

Bruno Carlos sighed.

“In any case, the soldiers and citizens have been calling for war. I believe Elizabeth opposed it as she is a pacifist.”

“Of course.”

She left school with the imperial knights because of this.

On the way back to the capital, she was attacked by Margaret’s supporters who were in the war faction.

The knights died and Elise was nearly killed.

As Elise promised to read Bastian manuscript, Bastian coincidentally saved her while he was trying to give her his work.

Normally, people would be afraid after experiencing such event. However, Elise did not give up her goal of going back to the capital.

They rested in a hotel in Applewood for a night, but received the news regarding the death of the queen the next day.

In addition, soldiers were after Elise and a string of events happened. Even Elise could not take it anymore and cried.

Breaking out of encirclement, defeating a female knight named Glenda and escaping out of Applewood.

They eventually arrived here due to meeting the friendly bearded carriage driver.

“Elise is definitely against war.”

“However, the citizens will not agree with the new queen when she has a Belgariane friend who share the same name as the prince of Belgaria.

“Eh!?”

Bastian did not consider this before.

Bruno Carlos continued: “The citizens will only think that the new queen isn’t a pacifist, but just a puppet of Belgaria.”

“What’s that about! I am…!!”

No, it couldn’t be helped that this man will say it this way.

How would the citizens react when they know that Bastian was a friend of Elise.

“It’s fine if you’re a mercenary or she is relying on you to get here…… However, that’s not the case if you are her friend. You’re a Belgariane after all!”

“Argh……”

Bastian faltered.

He thought that everything would be settled once they reached the capital.

However, his existence would cause trouble for Elise who would be the next queen.

“There must not be any Belgaria’s shadows on Elizabeth and the parliament is the representative of the citizens. Even if she was named the successor by queen Charlotte, there could be a chance that the parliament will object.”

“……”

Bastian was speechless.

He never once thought about it.

Bruno Carlos warned him,

“You also cherish Elizabeth, right? If that’s the case, you can understand without me saying.”

His tone was firm.

It was not a command nor blaming him. Bastian racked his brain.

He remembered the old man in the palace.

His frozen brain started churning again.

“After all, I’m just supporting her. If my presence will cause her trouble, then it’s easy.”

Bruno Carlos waited for his answer anxiously.

While Bastian was confirming it.

“—— My disappearance will solve it.”

Silence fell between them

Although that was not the original intention, but it was the best answer.

Using his right hand to support his sunglasses, Bastian turned around.

“I will leave the rest to you, Mr Bruno Carlos.”

“You’re not going to see her one last time?”

“The soldiers wouldn’t want to see the new queen crying over a Belgariane, no?”

“You’re right.”

If this was the case, this was really an unprecedented gloomy farewell.

Hence, he was somewhat sad.

Although it was earlier than expected, he knew that they would need to part way someday. If they safely reached the capital, Bastian’s mission would be over.

“Do you have any message for me to pass to her?”

“Hm? Ah, then please……”

His hand reached for the book that was bound to his belt. This was something Elise promised to read, it was Bastian’s work.

However, his hand stopped.

If he gave her his work which was written in Belgaria language…… She would definitely read it since she was serious by nature. However, this would cause a commotion during this period of time while she ascend the throne.

That would be due to his own manuscript. Bastian thought about this countless times. Just this book could easily trouble Elise, causing the parliament to challenge her. This further upset Bastian.

More importantly, if this book, which he wrote, was given to a stubborn old man like Bruno Carlos, Elise probably would not be able to see it.

No, wouldn’t it be inspected since this would be handed to a royalty?

This book represents the author’s feeling—— He wanted people who know about it read it, but did not want outsiders to read it.

How embarrassing!

That being said, he was not that thick-skinned to say something like meeting her one last time.

The corner of Bastian’s mouth twisted.

He put down his hand which was in front of his chest.

“Nothing…… There’s nothing to give her.”

“Is that so? In that case, at least leave a message, I can help you pass it to her.”

“…… Huu…… The holy knight began his journey as a new darkness called him forth. Endless battle and death are calling me.”

Bruno Carlos nodded.

“Is that a code?”

“I’m sorry, please forget what I just said.”

It did not give a serious vibe to others no matter what. That phrase is more suitable when escaping from one’s homeland. Bastian thought.

Bruno Carlos wanted to give Bastian some gold, but he rejected. After all, he did not want to bring along such things.

Bastian raised one of his hand and walked out of the room.

“Well, this journey was a fun experience for me.”

“I will pass this message to her.”

Bruno Carlos said with a pained expression.

The door closed.

At that moment, he said softly.

“…… Sorry.”

“Can you go to the dining hall first?”

Elise, who was told that, was chased out to have a meal alone.

A circular dining hall, circular dining tables, even the chairs were circular.

Bastian is hungry, so he will definitely come here once he is done—— Elise thought.

Elise had a bad premonition and tried to return to the room, but was stopped by the guards.

“This is an order by the commander.” After hearing them said that three times, she finally gave up.

Although she was worried, she thought there would be no problem if it was Bastian. Rather, he would be worried about her instead, Elise thought. Not long after that, the door opened.

Her uncle stood there alone.

Bruno Carlos dismissed the soldiers.

Elise was uneasy about it.

“That……”

“Sorry to let you wait, Elizabeth.”

"……That, uncle?"

"If it's about Bastian…… For your sake, he returned. He said that it was fun throughout this journey."

After hearing those words, Elizabeth wanted to dash towards the door.

"How can that be!"

"You cannot go!"

An angry voice as loud as thunder resounded.

"Hya!?"

Elise was stopped by the voice.

Bruno Carlos warned her.

"He did this for you! Do you not understand? Elizabeth!"

"B-but…"

Elise was aware of it. If she was close to a Belgariane, it would bring many dangers. Even if she knew about it, tears started to form at the corners of her eyes.

"But, not even saying a farewell, how selfish."

"Do you want to let the soldiers see you cry? Do you want to let his sacrifice go to waste? If you do not want to inherit queen Charlotte's will…"

He stopped his words upon there.

"Eh?!" Elizabeth was surprised as she saw tears dripping down from Bruno's eye.

"Sorry."

"Uncle?"

"Go and have your meal. It must be tough on you during the journey to here. Do have a bath too."

Elise understood that she could only do as he said. However, her heart says otherwise and has yet to accept such a farewell.

"Come, have a seat."

Bruno Carlos picked up the chair which was knocked down. Using the chair to support his shoulders as he sat down, he looked like a depressed child.

A spoon was handed over.

"Does the food here fits your taste? We, the soldiers, were taught that eating and resting are also part of our responsibility. That goes the same you, isn't it?"

"Yes."

However, the spoon in her hand felt as if it was heavy. Even the dish in front that should be delicious looked like a lump of mud to her.

Elise's mouth was moving, but nothing was said.

"Bastian, he really left?"

At that moment, there was a knock on the door.

Could it be Bastian?! Elise harboured such impossible hope.

However, the voice beyond the door was not one that she recognised.

"Reporting, commander!"

"Please wait a moment."

Bruno Carlos stood up and opened the door personally.

The soldier stood still and gave a bow.

"Sorry to disturb you while you are having your meal."

"Princess Elizabeth is tired, let us move to another room to discuss military matters."

"Understood!"

"I will be back soon." Leaving such words behind, Bruno Carlos left the room.

Leaving Elise alone in the room.

Bastian was wandering in the streets.

He was depressed during dusk, but became angry as he walked on the mountain trail in the night.

"Uooooooh!!"

Running as he shouted, he transformed his emotions into sweat.

When he realised it, it took him just ten minutes to return to the city which took him and Elise two hours to climb.

The sun slowly set in the west, causing the red sky to be slowly dyed black. During this moment, Bastian was walking on the messy roads in the city.

On both sides of the streets, there were shops that were opening, while some were closing their stalls.

"Welcome! Please have a taste of this!"

A young vendor was trying to attract customers aggressively.

"Eh? Me?"

There was a brick oven at the side of the road. Sticks of potato were being roasted.

Thinking about it, there was a fragrance of potato roasting.

There were also people selling roasted sweet potato.

“You’re a student, right? It’s rare to see one here! How about it, the sweet potato is fresh!”

“… Potato is it? No, I don’t have any money…… Ah, well…… it should be fine now.”

Bastian removed his sunglasses.

“What could this be traded for?”

“Awa!? Ahh…… Even all the potato here isn’t enough to compensate you!”

“No, it’s fine.”

“I can’t! As a trader, one must be honest. I rather not take than taking more than I should.”

“Is that so?”

“That’s right! That’s right! You can have it, you look like you are going to collapse any moment.”

“…… Sorry.”

“If you want to pay, just a token sum will do. How about one pound?”

“That is expensive!? Where did the honest trading go?”

The vendor laughed.

No matter what, it had been awhile since Bastian had a meal.

Bastian sat on a chair beside the streets. There was no table, but a basket was in front of the chair. It was to collect the used wooden sticks.

The vendor served the potato.

Receiving it, Bastian stared at the potato.

It was warm and had a fragrance, but he felt that the salt was not enough.

Delicious! After finishing one, the young vendor said “That’s a great image of eating! Have another one!” The vendor served him another potato.

Bastian finished the second potato in an instant.

The way Bastian ate the potatoes attracted people, causing them to think that the food must taste really good.

Even though it was closing time , business was strangely good. If this was premeditated, this young vendor must be talented in doing business.

The chairs placed beside the stall were mostly filled, it was almost a full house.

After finishing his meal, Bastian’s stomach swelled.

He yelled, ran and ate……

He thought that he was not as depressed as before.

All his trouble poured out together with a long sigh.

“Haa…… Well, isn’t it fine? In the first place, I came here to study to avoid those troublesome politics. I can’t become involved in another country's’ politics.”

I trust that Elise’s uncle will definitely bring her to the capital.

Bastian’s head was full of faces that Elise made before.

A shocked face after hearing his words.

A determined face as she stared at him to reject his ideas.

Her calm face as she retorts Bastian.

Huh? Why am I only thinking of such thing? Am I going crazy? Aren’t there supposed to be more sweet memories? While thinking that way, Bastian turned his head while it got more bustle behind him.

“Hey! Twenty servings! Hurry up!”

“Got it! Please wait a moment!”

It was a mercenary group.

There should be more than ten people. That reminds me, the city seems to be filled with mercenaries. Bastian raised his brows and asked the busy vendor.

“Hey, why are there so many mercenaries in this city? Is it always like this?

While the vendor turned his back on him, he baked potatoes in the oven and said.

“No, there aren’t that many normally. This is also the first time for me. Though thanks to the lord here gathering the mercenaries, business is booming for me.”

“Gathering mercenaries? Is it to prepare for war?”

“Even if you ask me, I also do not know.”

“True…”

Sounds of laughter came from the group of mercenaries.

“I’m so grateful for this! To hire us even before the war.”

“It’s a good deal!”

“That’s right! Hahahaha!”

“Hey, it’s getting dark, students like you should be going home.”

They do not seemed to be locals based on their accent.

Perhaps they are mercenaries from afar.

That means that Bruno Carlos is preparing for war.

Dark clouds spread over Bastian's heart.

"…… Why is a pacifist, someone who opposes war…… preparing for war?"

This caused the mercenaries to laugh.

"Pacifist?! Hmph, those garbage have been expelled out of the military long ago!"

"……What?!"

"Take a look! This is a sword that was created just recently! This is also the new gun! These can be found easily across the nation. Be it Belgaria or Hispania, we will definitely not lose against them!"

"That's right! That's right!"

The mercenaries who were a little tipsy agreed nosily.

Bastian stood up.

"What kind of joke is this! That guy… What is he going to do with Elise!?"

He looked up to the mountain

Under the dark sky,

On the slope was a line of lights moving. Those light came from the torches that a group of people was holding.

"Oi…… What is that……?"

Bastian's lips quivered.

The vendor which used wooden plates to serve the potato also looked up.

"I don't think there will be any merchants going there at such timing. It should be the army instead."

This was not the time listening to such words.

Neither were there time for him to be stunned.

Bastian started running.

I'm too careless!!

* * *

Elise was feeling puzzled when she was told that a guest was coming.

Only Bastian knew about her coming to this Gray Bridge fort, so she was wondering who was the guest.

Perhaps the guest is the mayor of the city? Could it be that it's already exposed? Elise asked Bruno Carlos, but she did not get a reply.

"It's better not to let them wait too long."

"…… I understand."

Elise took a quick bath and changed to a formal attire.

The colour of the dress was not blue which her mother prepared for her to ascend the throne, but was red that seemed to be dyed by using red wine.

The dress was full of frills and the skirt' side was wide open, causing her to be unable to calm down.

Is this Bruno Carlos' interest? Elise could not really understand as this dress was gifted by him.

Bruno Carlos did not say anything, the two walked to the spiral stairs in silence.

At the highest level of the tower.

The guest was waiting here.

Bruno Carlos put his hand on the door, and lightly knocked.

"…… I'm really sorry."

The door opened.

Elise's body stiffen.

"Hm!?"

She was speechless.

As she realised she made a big mistake.

Princess Margaret was sitting on the sofa which was in the middle of the room.

"Goodnight, Liz. Are you fine now?"

"…… Margaret……"

"Ufufu … Please call me Garet. Although we aren't that close, we are cousins who shared the same blood."

"Ah…… This dress…"

The dress which Margaret wore was the same as the one that Elise wore, red in colour with many frills. The red dress coupled with the black hair made it looked as if a few drops of ink were dripped onto an excellent red wine.

Margaret showed a kind smile.

"That's great, it really suits you. I was wondering what should I do if you do not like it."

"Ah…… That…… Thank you."

"What is it, Liz? Why don't you have a seat?"

"…… Okay."

Elise steeled herself and entered the room.

Margaret patted the seat beside her. However, Elise was hesitant about sitting there.

“I’m fine with standing here.”

Finally, she stood a distance away from Margaret.

Margaret did not seem to mind as she continued smiling.

The room was circular with three windows. Bruno Carlos was guarding the door in which Elise entered from.

Beside Margaret was a knight in white.

As he was completely still, it made others felt as if he was a wax sculpture.

He was tall, had bluish ash hair and ice blue eyes. Hanging on his waist was a fine sword.

When Elise looked at him, Margaret also shifted her sight to him.

“Why don’t you introduce yourself, after all it is a rare chance.”

The knight bowed deeply.

“It is an honour to meet you, Princess Elizabeth. I am colonel Oswald Coulthard, an operations staff officer in the High Britannia military headquarter.”

This man gave off a frightening atmosphere.

“…… I am Elizabeth Victoria.”

Margaret who was on the sofa stretched her hand out and pressed onto the knight’s waist.

“Ufufu…… Oswald was the one who told me that you will be coming here. He sure is omniscient.”

“Oh noble princess Margaret, this humble servant doesn’t deserve such praise. I’m just a frog in a well. Princess Elizabeth arrived here half a day earlier than expected.”

“Ara, is that so? I shall call you frog then.”

Elise staggered for a moment.

“How can that be…… Everything was… known? Why?”

“It was not because you leaked any important clues, just that you do not have any other options.”

“But…… Is that so……”

This was a tough journey.

Graham and the six imperial knights sacrificed themselves to protect her.

Bastian also risked his life to help her.

Elise used all effort beyond what she ever did to reach here.

Only to find out that she was dancing in the palm of the man called Oswald.

There were neither pride or compassion in his gaze, as if he lacked something called emotions. He merely stare at Elise.

“I have often heard about you from queen Charlotte. Intelligent, gentle, someone without much self desires and prioritise work more than personal issues.”

“…… Is that so? I am flattered.”

The sudden praised caused Elise to be alert.

“However, you are the same as queen Charlotte, someone who do not consider the big picture. This country had reached a point of no return, that is even more so after today. Something like the pacifist faction would just be a burden for us.”

Tch—— Elise gritted her teeth.

“So… Based on what you said, this country is now full of people who are in the war faction? It is strange that the mindset of the people changed so fast within a few years.”

“That is so, I cannot deny that way of thinking.”

“What do you get in exchange for sacrificing the lives of the people in the war?”

Oswald placed his hand on his chin.

He smiled.

“Queen Charlotte asked this humble servant the same question and my reply was wealth.”

“This is……”

Her stomach tighten.

Margaret shrugged.

“How unfortunate, Oswald, really unfortunate. Things like money and such are meaningless. It’s really unfortunate if Oswald do not understand that I do not have anything I want.”

“I understand now. As this minor servant is worldling, so I wish to obtain those meaningless thing.”

“How disappointing.”

Margaret lightly knocked on Oswald.

Elise probed further.

“Is it really for wealth? That will be reasonable if you are really after wealth. However, you are not the type to do so due to greed.”

“Ho?… For you to understand me from just this meeting.”

“…… If you are simply greedy, Margaret will not put you by her side.”

“Oh?”

“That’s right! I didn’t know Liz know me so well. It feels as if you can see right through me, causing my heart to pound so fast.”

Oswald, who seemed impressed, nodded his head.

“What an excellent insight. As expected of someone who is evaluated as the same as queen Charlotte. This humble servant sure is ignorant. Princess Elizabeth, you are indeed clever. It is as you said, the aim is not just about wealth.”

“That……?”

“It is for war. Money is necessary for war. The war with Belgaria is to earn money and further expanding the war. It is endless and eternal. Until this body decay, the nation is fatigued, soldiers and officials died and this country on the verge of collapsing, all this requires war. For that purposes, money is required.”

“Ara, how interesting, this is something that I will not feel bored at all.”

Elise widen her eyes and asked Oswald.

“W-what?! Are you serious?!”

“I am serious and calm…”

“Why!?”

“That is because I am following this country’s ruler, princess Margaret, order.”

“What!?”

Margaret who was named was laughing while pressing her stomach. Laughter which sounds like the mocking of a devil filled the room.

Elise was angry to the point in which tears fell.

These people… They are fooling around with this nation!

They are doing so just to kill boredom and pleased themselves!

Elise stared at the direction of the door.

“Bruno Carlos! You stopped being a pacifist just to serve this kind of people!? Where did the will of a soldier protecting High Britanna go?!”

“…… My apologies…… Even if I oppose them alone, the result would simply be a change in commander for this fort.”

“Argh……”

Under Margaret’s gaze, Oswald walked towards the table and picked up a teapot. While pouring tea, he continued talking,

“This humble officer felt since a long time ago that building an organization actually resemble playing chess much more than a war. On the battlefield, there are no queens that could fly from one side of the board to the other. In contrast, we can peel off the faction serving the Queen from the edge and apply pressure to the

inside to gain more military power… Since the other party has few means of recovering, we can gain the crown just by repeating this process several times."

Margaret received the black tea and sipped it.

"How rare, Oswald. For you to engage in such conversation, you must be in a good mood."

"Pardon me."

"That's fine. It's my turn to continue the conversation. Hey, Liz…… What kind of person is Bastian who travelled with you?"

"Eh? Why……"

"I have investigated the school. He is a Belgaria's noble. However, the name Bastian sure is interesting, for it to be the same as the third prince of Belgaria. Furthermore, he possesses the same red eyes and ridiculous strength."

"T-that is… just a coincidence."

"It is unfortunate that we couldn't meet as Bruno Carlos allowed him to return. That's bad, I wonder why?~"

"M-my apologies. As the report said that he is rather sharp-witted. For the safety of Your Highness, this humble servant believe that he should not be allowed to come near Your Highness."

Bruno Carlos who was in front of the door lowered his head.

Margaret clapped her hands.

"Come and eat some fruit tarts, Liz. I prepared it specially for you, it would be delicious." Margaret changed the topic suddenly.

When conversing with her, she would not hesitate to change the topic if she felt tired of the previous topic.

Elise retreated a few steps back.

"Now, I …… does not have any appetite since I had my dinner.".

"Ara, is that so? But I still think that it's better if you eat it. After all, this is your last meal, Liz."

As if declaring her death sentence, such unexpected words came from Margaret's mouth

Her tone was as if she was asking her guests if they want to have some tea in the middle of a conservation.

Elise retreated.

Her back touched the window.

"Uh…"

The tower gets thinner as it approached the top. As she was on the highest floor, it was too narrow to escape. Oswald put the teapot onto the table and stood up.

"Today is the 20th…… 22nd will be the last day of the Silent Week, we have to participate in queen Charlotte's funeral."

“I-is that so? I also wish to participate. In fact, I have to participate no matter what.”

“…… It is enough for Your Highness to participate by staying beside Her Majesty.”

Oswald took out his sword with his right hand.

Margaret opened the box which was on the table. Inside the box were strawberry tarts.

It would be nice if the tart was sweet.

As Elise did not like to eat sour strawberry tart.

Elise did not know the reason why Margaret purposely chose a food that she did not like.

Behind her was the window, she has no way to escape.

“Kuh…… What… are you guys … planning to do……”

Margaret grinned.

“I do not know about Oswald, but for me, I just want to excited since I hate boredom. However, I wonder how joy feels like?~”

“My raison d’etat is to let Your Highness Margaret obtain happiness.”

At this moment, a beam of light could be seen from the outside of the window.

As if it was lightning.

For a moment, it looked as if it was daytime.

Following that was the shattering of glass.

“Hyah!?”

Elise groaned softly due to the screeching sound.

Oswald observed the outside of the window.

“…… So he is here…… Looks like Glenda failed.”

“Ara, it seems that death sentence should really be bestowed.”

“I understand.”

The castle was on fire, causing thick black smoke to rise.

The warning by the soldiers came beyond the door.

“Reporting! Reporting!”

“Just report immediately!”

The soldier began to report loudly after Bruno Carlos finished his words.

“Just now, the boy who left the castle returned! The female knight fell down the valley and the main gate was breached!”

“What!?”

Bruno Carlos was the only one who was shocked.

Not just Elise, even Oswald and Margaret knew about Bastian’s fighting capability.

Another report came after that.

It also came from behind the closed door.

“While we were engaging with the intruder, the first gunpowder storage room caught fire! The whole unit was mobilised, but we still could not extinguish the fire……”

“Fools! There are oil besides it!”

“It exploded when the fire spread just now!”

“Ku… That…”

The report continued.

“The first team to the thirteenth team was wiped out! The intruder is now closing in to the central tower!”

“Commander, please retreat! Right now we are suppressing with thirty soldiers using three ranks of alternating volley fire. However, there are already some casualties as he countered back……”

Bruno Carlos growled.

“The opponent is just one teenager! Why is it that there are still casualties!?”

“T-that…… After he hid behind a wall, a part of the building suddenly came flying!
I saw him empty handed, but I do not understand how he used something like a catapult to throw the things,”

“What nonsense are you saying!? I will throw you lot into the river if you guys continue to say such ridiculous words!”

To a normal human, this situation was unbelievable to them.

Be it a sword, bow or even a spear, the intruder did not have any but came with just his body.

He came here simply with great strength—— This kind of enemy caused the soldiers to panic. Furthermore, he was quicker than a bullet.

Oswald shrugged his shoulders.

“Looks like it’s only a matter of time.”

“Ara ara, how troublesome. Could it be that, in this crisis, I will die here?”

“You do not need to worry about this point, Your Highness Margaret.”

Elise heard the report.

The sounds of gunshots beyond the door also stopped.

Her chest was starting to feel hot.

Below here…… He's here!?

Elise unlocked the window with her hand that was behind her back and used her shoulder to push it open.

As they were on a mountain, the strong wind blew into the room and caused the curtains to flutter. A pungent smell of something burning and the smoke made breathing to be difficult.

Margaret yelled.

"No, my hair! My hair is getting messy!"

"…… Hm."

Oswald drew his sword

And prepared himself

He faced Elise who had her back towards him-- Wrong, he was standing in front of Margaret.

Your Highness Margaret, please stay still."

"Why?"

"There's an enemy."

His sight was on the tower beside them.

Elise stretched her body out of the window and yelled downwards. However, there was quite a distance between her and the ground. In addition, there were the sounds of gunshots.

"Bastian——!!"

She sent a piercing cry.

A reply came not long after that.

"Hmph, so that really is the place."

"Eh?!"

Elise looked up.

At a distance where one could reach by extending his hand—— No, the face of a teenager appeared at the tower beside them which was a distance closer than the ground.

"Are you still alive? Are you hurt? Did anyone torture you?

"Ah…"

Tears began to form.

This lasted for awhile.

Elise finally shed tears.

“Sniff…… Bastian……”

His face was dirty, clothes was tattered and blood was oozing everywhere.

Under his left armpit was a few guns, while his right hand was holding a gun properly.

“W-why are you crying, Elise! Are you in pain?!”

“I-I’m not crying, it’s because of the smoke.”

“Ah, is that so? It’s great that I made it in time.”

* * *

To be honest, Bastian was at his limit.

He might be faster than the most elite of knights, but he couldn’t dodge bullets.

He had to predict the path of the bullet and evade before the shot was fired.

If there were multiple enemies, he would have to predict the bullet path of all of them. Thus, the place he could dodge to was limited. He needed to be aware of the bullets that might fly towards the place he was dodging towards.

Using several times the speed of a normal person running, he barely managed to evade the hail of gunfire.

His body felt heavy from fatigue.

And he couldn’t dodge all of them.

He was hit twice in the back.

From the front, he looked fine— but if you touch him, you would see that he was drenched in blood.

He won’t last long this way.

The soldiers in the castle were recovering from the confusion. If they calm down and surround him, it would be bad. If he didn’t got out early just now, it won’t help no matter how fast he was or how well he could predict the enemy's’ movement.

In order to regulate his ragged breathing, he breathed deeply.

“Inside that room… Could it be, Princess Margaret!?”

Showing her face from beneath the armpit of the white knight protecting her, the black hair girl waved.

“Yaho~ We finally met~”

“Your highness, it’s dangerous!”

The white knight blocking the way shielded her.

“What are you doing, Oswald.”

“This is not a time for greetings, your highness. He actually broke through the defences of this fort alone… That far exceeded what your humble servant expects.”

Margaret said ‘*You're useless Mr Fish.*’ and smiled.

Bastian aimed the gun in his right hand at the knight called Oswald. It might hit Margaret behind him if he were to dodged.

“I didn’t face much resistance from the soldiers… Maybe they didn’t want to protect an evil princess? But if they revolt against you, even their family would be dragged in.”

Oswald shook his head lightly.

“The morale of the soldiers are high, they are just not trained to deal with someone as fast and strong as prince Bastian.”

“Strong? Ara, you are making me blush— Ah, I am not a prince okay!?” Bastian adjusted the sunglasses he was wearing with his hand.

He had obviously been exposed, but he was still making excuses.

Oswald was making a serious face, but the corner of his lips suddenly twisted.

“Your cheat like capabilities are beyond imagination, but you can’t cover everything if you are alone.”

“What?”

Elise leaned in from the window and shouted:

“Bastian, behind you!”

“Ughh!?”

He ducked.

Bastian felt a fierce slash went through where his head was a moment ago.

The curtains split in two and fell.

Bastian threw the guns he was hugging in his left arm out.

At the same time, he turned around and shot with his right arm.

His shot was on target! Blood splattered out from his enemy.

It was Glenda. She covered her shoulder with her hand.

“Ugghhhh… I… I can still fight.”

“Are you for real?”

He fought her at the entrance of the castle once, but he didn’t thought about killing her. However, she should have lost her ability to fight.

Could it be that High Britannia has someone with superhuman physical abilities like Bastian?

He heard a sudden scream.

Looking at the window in a hurry, he saw Elise.

She was grabbing on the window ledge, her legs hanging in the air.

She might fall at any moment and her face was turning green.

Oswald was approaching her with a sword in hand.

“It lack elegance, but let’s end this show.”

“Hold, hold it!”

Bastian’s thoughts raced—

Pick up the dropped gun and shoot him?

No, Elise will be killed the moment he pick up the guns.

Throw his dagger?

If Oswald was half competent, that would work. But he was a skilled fighter who will probably dodge or knock it away. That won’t save Elise either.

“Prince Bastian! Your reason for fighting is going to disappear!”

“I am… not some bullshit prince—!”

Bastian leapt out of the window.

He kicked at the tower with all his might.

Bastian reached out for Elise.

“Jump! Elise!”

“Bastian!”

She was surprised for a moment, and then followed Bastian’s words without hesitation.

Before Oswald’s sword could cut her down, her small hands released the window.

“What, she jumped…!!”

Elise jumped.

From the tower in the night.

Her blonde hair and red dress spreads. Bastian reached out for her with all he had got.

“Elise!”

“Bastian!”

She also used all her effort to reach for Bastian.

Their fingers closed in on each other.

Finally, Bastian grabbed Elise's out reached hand.

And embraced her with his right arm.

At the same time, he reached for the walls of the tower with his left.

Using his momentum, he kicked the tower on the opposite side. The tower grew wider towards the bottom.

He grabbed onto a window in one of the middle floors of the tower—

This wasn't a problem for the usual Bastian.

But bearing the weight of two people with one arm and the acceleration from freefall was too much. That instant, a cracking sound could be heard from Bastian's back.

"Guahhh!?"

"What, what is the matter Bastian?!"

"I'm fine… Hurry… the bullets are coming…"

"Yes!"

Elise was good in physical exercise. Or rather, she was one of the better ones among her female classmates.

Grabbing the windows, she pulled herself up and slid in through the window.

Bastian followed shortly after.

The two of them collapsed onto the floor, their limbs sprawled randomly as they panted.

"Hah—Hah—Hah— Hah—"

A sharp pain came from his back, and Bastian couldn't move.

Elise was in tears besides him.

"You saved me again."

"Hah-- Hah-- Have… you given up, Elise?"

"Eh?"

"Today is the 20th."

"Yes."

"From now… We won't make it if we walked, but it is possible if we use a carriage."

"That's right. I won't give up. For the sake of the people who helped me."

“That’s the spirit!”

Bastian pulled himself up.

Elise suddenly held her breath.

“Bastian! Those wounds!?”

“Don’t mind them… That was just my mistake. Rather than that, if we don’t move, we will be surrounded.”

“Ye, yes.”

Her voice was trembling.

It couldn’t be helped. Bastian himself knew he wasn’t doing too good.

And the place he laid on had enough blood to convince others someone died there.

“Well, the just people have the protection of the fairies, so I won’t die.”

“If you have the strength to joke, you should be fine.”

They left the room after this and went down the stairs through the spiral staircase.

* * *

To avoid the soldiers guarding the bottom floor of the tower, they jumped from the tower midway.

Bastian used princess carry on Elise, and although she felt embarrassed, she bore with it.

However, the situation was more serious than they imagined.

No matter how light Elise was, there was still weight. Bastian’s legs and waist was accumulating fatigue, and he was losing a lot of blood.

More importantly, he couldn’t use his hands if he carries Elise.

He couldn’t climb, roll or defend himself.

Bastian grit his teeth.

“Ughh… This is terrible…”

“Are you pushing yourself Bastian!? Even if it is just you…”

“Ah? What nonsense are you saying? I will spank you if you say that.”

“Hyou!? But…”

“The terrible thing is about my masterpiece! If the protagonist carries the heroine while swinging a long sword, how is it done!? Does he has four arms!?”

The scene was too beautiful so he didn’t thought about it too much-- But when he noticed what he wrote, Bastian was so embarrassed that he wanted to roll on the ground.

“What a big plot hole! If I don’t change it the readers will get angry!”

“That’s what they mean when they refers to an idiot. Saying this at such a time!”

“Hahaha… Such a time? You make it sound as if I am in a crisis.”

“Eh?”

“In the castle of the enemy, surrounded by soldiers using a new type of guns, carrying a princess in my arms with bullet wounds on my back. Well, that is just a bit troublesome… that’s all.”

“That…”

“Fighting an infallible foe, having to pass through a place without cover, it would be a crisis when that happens.”

“I give up, to boast to such an extent, you are really something.”

“I am not boasting, I am serious!”

Elise was in his arms.

And with just that, his body felt mysteriously lighter--

Fatigue? Bullet wounds? Surrounded? So what of it? That was the kind of feeling he had.

They finally reached the outer wall of the castle.

Bastian carried Elise on his back and scaled the stone walls as if he was climbing a rope.

The stonewalls were built to stop people from climbing it, with only small protrusion on it. But that wasn’t a problem for Bastian. It was hard to apply force on these tiny holds, but because he was very strong, so he could pull his body up easily.

The sturdy wall was easier to scale when compared with cliffs that are brittle.

It was a good story material for Bastian.

Aside from his strangely hyper emotions because he was carrying Elise…

The rough structure of Gray bridge fort was as follows. There was all sorts of equipment to guard against enemy attacks, but they were equally effective to target people leaving.

On top of that, although the soldiers received orders to guard this place, the ones who got the orders to stop anyone from escaping numbered less than half.

The command structure was also in chaos, so for the soldiers, leaving incoming enemies aside, their defence net against an escaping enemy, especially one that was outrageously strong, it was normal for them to fail.

As for the personal guards of Margaret, they were so busy fighting the fire on the burning royal carriage that they didn’t notice that Margaret was nearly shot.

That was one of the reason why the commander Oswald didn’t plan to include them in his combat forces.

Bastian defeated the guards on top of the stone wall.

Actually, he merely threw them down. If they were lucky enough, they will survive.

And in this situation when his life was in danger, the unpractical thinking of not taking the lives of enemies was not permitted.

The enemies were soldiers too.

Since they were holding weapons capable of killing, they should have the resolved to be killed too.

Normally, you can't see anything in the darkness. Even if there was moonlight, you can only see a rough silhouette.

However, one of the towers were burning brightly now like a giant torch.

Even the city at the foot of the hill could be seen clearly.

"As I thought, we have to cross that bridge."

"… How did you pass it when you came?"

"I fought that female knight called Glenda one on one, pressured her to the gate and kicked her into the river. I then climbed up the walls… Ara, I didn't thought she will catch up. Seeing how she wasn't wet, maybe she didn't fell in anyway."

"River huh."

What, will jumping into the river be faster than crossing the bridge?"

"We will probably die if we jump from there!?"

"That's true. Dropping into the river normally should work, but…"

Due to the heavy rain these past few days, the volume of water in the river was huge.

But there was still a long distance from the outer walls to the river.

The valleys formed a V shape.

It was hard to see in the dark, but if they jumped, they will probably hit the rocks instead of the water. Leaving Bastian aside, Elise won't be saved this way.

"… But… How chilling."

Bastian stared at the scene behind him.

He could hear the sound of people fighting the fire in the fort, but at least their pursuit would be halted.

He could sense the presence of soldiers around them, but they didn't attack him…

As if they were holding their breaths.

"Are they waiting for us to cross the bridge?"

"The possibility of that is high."

After that, the ground started to shake.

The gate leading to the bridge was opened.

Since Bastian already scaled the walls, the gate was meaningless and only served to hinder the progress of the soldiers, a bold move.

A knight appeared from the opened door.

Adorned with light armour white in colour.

It was Oswald.

He wasn't speaking to anyone in particular as his voice reverberated in the air.

"-- You finally made it up the walls! After that, you just need to cross this bridge to get outside. However, that will be impossible through the hail of gunfire!"

And obviously, Bastian knew what he was talking about.

"However, shooting someone who is running away is ungentlemanly! More important, I cannot allow any further slight against my honour! And to not disappoint the beautiful princess Margaret."

Bastian hugged on to Elise tightly.

Attracting the enemy's' attention with words while attacking them behind, such things were common.

Bastian started sensing for the presence of enemy troops.

"… Nothing… They are not planning to do that?"

"Ba, Bastian…!?"

She was fine when Bastian carried her and ran all over the place, but Elise's face was blushing beet red just because he hugged her a bit tighter.

He don't get it.

Because Elise became so shy, it made Bastian shy too, so they pulled slightly away from each other.

"Eh… Don't get too far from me. Even though it is night, it is bright and we will be discovered."

"I-I understand."

She tidied her messy dress.

Now was not the time to act like a love fool.

Bastian shouted at Oswald who was on the bridge.

"I am here! What do you want!?"

Doing that would expose himself, but he already took out the scouts earlier. His rough position was already known to the enemy.

That was why the enemy commander showed himself.

Oswald said:

“I challenge you to a one on one duel! I have my own reputation to uphold. After you deal such a deal blow to us, I would be a laughingstock if I had to rely on numbers and terrain to defeat you in the very end.”

“Are you stupid!? What is in it for us!”

“If you win this humble one, I will let you go without hesitation. On top of that, I will escort you to the royal capital.”

“What did you say!?”

“How do you find these terms? Even if you escape from here, you won’t make it to the royal capital in time. Isn’t this a great proposition for you!?”

“You think I will believe you!?”

“The words of this humble one is obviously worthless! However, this is the words of the saintly princess Margaret!”

He couldn’t see the soldiers right now, but he could feel that the castle was in an uproar.

This negotiation could be seen by Margaret too.

“Let me consider it!”

After his short reply, Bastian turned towards the young girl besides him.

“Nah, Elise… What kind of personality does this Margaret have? I have been feeling that she is taking things lightly.”

It was not uncommon for royalties to hide their identities while walking around the city, but this was the first time he was greeted with a ‘Yaho’.

Elise felt a bit conflicted and said:

“To be honest, I think this elder cousin is weirder than I imagined. I can’t tell what she is thinking, even the position of Queen doesn’t mean much to her as long as she is happy. I am not sure about that man named Oswald though.”

“So it is possible this proposal is real?”

“It might be a trap.”

“No, it shouldn’t be… Is there anything worse than running across a bridge while being aimed by soldiers with guns? What other traps would they need?”

“Are you going?”

“Yup, I am going.”

Elise suddenly pounced on him.

“Don’t go!”

“Wahhh!? Why!?”

“Take me with you, please. I-I don’t want to let you get hurt anymore.”

“… Can’t be helped then. If we are talking about danger, there are no safe place around here.”

After giving it some thoughts, if he leave Elise here, she couldn’t defend herself against the attacking soldiers.

Maybe that was their motive.

“Let’s go Elise! I will blow that jerk dressed in white and green away, and go to the royal capital tomorrow!”

“Yes!”

After sliding down the castle walls, the two of them stood before Oswald.

Behind them was the castle.

The gate was open.

Margaret was probably watching.

And the soldiers equipped with the new model of guns.

They couldn’t dodge the bullets even if they run. If they had horses, it might be faster if he rode along the hilly path with Elise in his arms, but…

“For us right now, our only option is to defeat you and make Margaret honour her words.”

“Protecting princess Elizabeth all this way alone… By right, I should praise you for making it this far.”

Oswald was calm.

This fellow wasn’t just all talk. As they face off each other, Bastian tightened his nerves.

They were about ten paces apart.

Bastian took out his dagger.

“… I don’t really want to use this.”

“Is that Vite Espace Trois? So you really are prince Bastian.”

“Don’t tease me. I don’t know what that is.”

Bastian adjusted his sunglasses.

He told Elise to ‘back away a bit’ to make her retreat.

If the other party goes back on their words, the two of them-- No, if they open fire, than the three of them including Oswald would be killed in the barrage of bullets.

He could only trust Margaret-- Bastian felt uneasily.

“I’m coming!”

Bastian charged ahead.

Oswald drew the sword on his waist at the same time, it was a slender straight sword.

The type more suitable for thrust instead of slashes.

It looked like a sword that would break if it hits steel armour, but unfortunately Bastian was wearing a student uniform. He didn't even had leather armour.

He was lightly equipped.

Closing the gap in one shot, Bastian kicked.

"Doryaa!"

For a duel with swords, starting the fight with a kick would surprise anyone.

He would win if he shattered the opponent's kneecap. Even if the kneecap didn't break, it would still restrain the mobility of his opponent.

Since Bastian was using a dagger, it was easier for his opponent to gain the initiative. To counter, he had to do a sneak attack.

However, Oswald's expression didn't change and remained calm.

"Here?"

A sudden thrust came at Bastian.

Although he twisted his body immediately, the attack was too fast and Bastian took a hit on his flank.

"Guaah!?"

"Phew… You dodged it. Then how about this?"

Before Bastian could recover his posture, the next attack came.

Bastian deflected it with his dagger.

But he didn't felt it hitting anything.

Oswald withdrew his blade with a sharp sound.

"Even though this is made from the new material, it is still a thin blade, I should avoid clashing directly with elf silver."

"Are you serious, shit… He is faster than I am?"

Failing to dodge the opponent's attack and his kick being defended in a one on one fight, such things had never happened before. Although he was tired and injured, his adversary was definitely skilled.

"I was asked by the benevolent princess Margaret to emerge victorious, so I can't hold back."

"Interesting!"

Bastian won't give up if it was a battle of speed.

Bastian took a step forward and swung his dagger.

Oswald's sword came suddenly before his face.

The edge brushed passed his nose.

Although Bastian wanted to slash the opponent's hand with a dagger-- but the opponent pulled his sword back and only brushed his shoulder.

Bastian turned and punched with his left fist.

Oswald parried Bastian with his left hand.

In contrast to Bastian straight line attack, Oswald's movement was like slowly drawing a circle.

As if he was--

"Predicting my movement!?"

"Although prince Bastian has superhuman speed and the strength to crush boulders, your movement is just like an amateur."

"What!? Me an amateur!?"

Bastian swung his sword and kick again.

But his movement was read and met with a riposte, Bastian was being wounded one sidedly.

"Ku…"

Speaking of which, this was the same feeling he had with Eddie's grandfather-- blah.

When he faces normal opponents, Bastian only need to focus and their movement was as slow as a slug.

So he didn't need to read the movement of his opponent, and could tell their next move course of action just by seeing their eyes and muscle twitches. That's how he dodge the gunshots.

However, if the opponent were really strong, they would have no preparatory actions, and their attack will land before he realize it--

That was the situation now.

And of course, he couldn't defend or evade in time.

Also, the enemy could read Bastian's every move, so no matter how fast he was, his action was countered before he could do anything--

Oh no.

This guy was really strong!

Bastian could tell that the earlier battles were just child's play.

Oswald effortlessly pushed Bastian to the brink of defeat with just a couple of exchanges.

His wounds kept increasing and his body became heavier.

It was like the opponent choosing the shortest path in a street he knew very well, while Bastian was walking around lost in an unfamiliar city.

He was chasing at full speed, but he met too many dead ends and always came in a moment late. Meanwhile, the opponent kept maintaining a certain distance--

In that case, he had to gain back the initiative.

But each one of his move were blocked and his attacks parried, the situation grew even more dire with time.

The enemy could read Bastian's move completely.

How did he read it?

Was it because the weapon was a dagger and the means of attack was limited?

Why was it limited?

Because the opponent will reach first--

What happens if he get hit?

"I am not afraid of you!"

"Well, it is about time to finish this."

"Kukuku… Let me show you my real power!! The power of darkness is residing my sword!"

"… Then… the power I am fighting against, is it the power of darkness or prince Bastian's real power?"

"Both, both of them are my powers!"

He took a stance.

Held his breath.

And charged at full speed!

"Haaaaahhhhh--!"

"How stupid."

As expected, he adopted a position to counter the charge.

If Bastian kept charging, he would be skewered like a potato.

"So what!?"

Bastian charged in.

The dagger and the sword glide pass each other. Oswald used the chance to avoid the attack. It was just enough for the dagger to pass harmlessly by.

But that wasn't what Bastian was aiming for.

Oswald stared with his eyes wide.

“What!?”

“I will take that arm!”

He took a step forward.

The sword hit the abdomen of Bastian. And sunk in.

The cold blade entered his belly.

Bastian swung his Vite Espace Trois.

And succeeded!

Blood covered the entire stone bridge.

Like water pouring out of a kettle, spilling all over.

“How’s that!”

“Ku… Foolish…”

Oswald’s sword fell from his hand.

That blow was too shallow and didn’t sever his hand. Blood dripped out gradually onto the bridge.

As for Bastian, his stomach was pierced.

He was bleeding even more--

Now!

With a sword wound to his stomach, Bastian retreated and reached for Elise’s waist with his left arm.

“Hyaa!? Bastian…!?”

He whispered into her ear.

“… We are going.”

Bastian started running.

After suddenly grabbing Elise by the waist.

And jumped from the stone bridge.

“Haaaahhhhh--!!”

“Kyaaaa--!!”

Bastian’s roar and Elise’s scream fell towards the valley together.

They jumped from the middle of the bridge.

It was far away from the outer walls.

The sound of something falling into the water could be heard.

Judging from sight, they must had fallen into the river.

Pressing the wounds on his hand, Oswald's mouth twisted.

"… Well done… prince Bastian."

The soldiers came running.

"Are you okay!?"

"Colonel! Your wounds!?"

"Staff Officer Sir!"

Moments later, a medic came as Princess Margaret strolled over slowly. It had been a long time since she walked such a long way with her own feet.

She looked really happy.

"You didn't win, Mr Fish."

"To disappoint the ever victorious princess Margaret, it is a shame. I am truly humbled."

"That's amazing, did he allowed himself to be stabbed in the stomach in order to jump into the river?"

"That is so… I was confused by his nonsensical words and gave him the chance."

"Ara ara, aren't you going to say something for yourself? You saw it coming but allowed your hand to be slashed anyway."

"Let me explain. If I moved my hand away any faster, I would drop my sword onto the floor and it would be my loss."

The medic cut Oswald's sleeve away and washed the wound with water.

He was still bleeding, but he could move his fingers.

"Colonel sir, does your fingers feel numb?"

"The cut isn't that deep."

"Yes. It should recover in a few days."

Margaret reached out her hand.

And put her finger on Oswald's wound.

"Eh!?"

Even Oswald couldn't help but react. His body turned stiff and he gritted his teeth to endure the pain.

Margaret observed him happily.

“It’s hurting you.”

“That is so. However, the happiness of the beautiful princess touch is greater than the pain.”

“Ara, you are really a hopeless Mr Fish. There’s smoke everywhere. And dust. I want to take a bath.”

“Well then, shall we return to the royal capital?”

She turned her gaze to the burning tower and laughed.

“Yes. I am already tired of this.”

Margaret licked the blood on her finger.

Epilogue: War War War

He saw a sea of blood in his dream.

He felt that he must never let of these hands.

But, whose hands were these?

The slender fingers were white as snow.

A girl's fingers.

He had to protect her no matter what, but he couldn't exert strength with his arm.

He remembered now, her name was——

The instant he remembered, that girl sunk into the sea of blood.

Only dream like whispers lingered in his ears:

Why did you let go?

* * *

"Elise!!"

"Hyaaa~~?"

Besides Bastian who suddenly sat up was the face of a girl on the verge of tears.

This was a room from somewhere.

Light as mellow as the morning sun shone in through the window.

Bastian laid on the bed covered in white bandages, patches of blood that turned black after drying was on him everywhere.

"This is…"

"Erm, well, Bastian… Are you still… alive?"

"… Elise, you… are here… Is this heaven?"

"Wonderful, it really is Bastian!"

"Elise!"

Bastian hugged Elise suddenly.

"Hyaaa!?"

He felt that body was squirming.

Soft tender body.

And her beating heart.

“Great! You are alive! You are alive right!? You didn’t sink in right!? I… didn’t… let go right!?”

“Let, let go Bastian… Ah, no… Dummy… She can see us!”

“Eh?”

Bastian lifted his head and shift his gaze.

There was a young girl with glasses who was blushing red in the room with them.

“Uwah…”

Dressed like a maid, she had a head of red hair that would definitely be compared to that of the emperor if she was in Belgaria.

She looked to be about Bastian’s age.

The girl’s face turned even redder and averted her face after adjusting her glasses.

“I-I didn’t see anything, please continue!”

“No… Continue what…?”

“Baka-tian! What shameless things are you planning to do!”

Elise waved her arms around frantically.

Oh right, I am hugging her right now.

Bastian released her reluctantly.

“I think I was called an incredible name just now.”

“That name suits you just fine! Doing such shameless things the moment you get up! My heart almost stopped from embarrassment! I was thinking that I-I finally had the chance to help you.”

Suddenly, her face turned entirely red.

The two girls were blushing so much that smoke was almost coming out from their face.

“… What is going on?”

Bastian scratched his head, confused by all this.

The glasses maid served some water to him.

“Please take this.”

“Thanks!”

“You can call me Shia. I have been serving the house of Tiraso Laverde since I was ten, I am seventeen now.”

“Ahh, then you are a year older than us. I am Bastian an exchange student from Belgaria…”

Elise cut him off.

“Allow me to make the introduction, Bastian is the third son of a Marquis house in Belgaria, and is here in High Brittania as a student. However, we were attacked by bandits while we were in the city of Gray Bridge.”

“Ah, I see.”

“It is a bit late, let me to introduce myself, I am Elise Archibald. To attend a funeral in my family, we left Applewood private academy, and on our way home… A journey with only children is dangerous indeed.”

She is lying without batting an eye— Bastian thought.

Shia who seemed like an honest girl didn’t suspect anything and listened with interest.

Bastian asked: “Ah, I remembered falling into a river, thanks for saving me.”

Elise became mad immediately.

“You didn’t jump off thinking that you will die right!?”

“Ah, erm, no such thing…”

To be frank, it would be fine as long as Elise was safe—— He did thought that way, but if he said it out loud, Elise will definitely get angry.

“We drifted in the river and met with a strong current. Luckily we didn’t get hurt, but Bastian lost consciousness and drank a lot of water. It was really dangerous, we were really lucky indeed.”

“Why so?”

The carriage of the Tiraso Laverde family happened to pass by with a doctor onboard. Thanks to his quick actions, we were saved.”

“Haaah…”

There were few nobles, and fewer skilled doctors, I was really lucky. Bastian was thankful for his great luck.

“If the cut into your abdomen was any deeper, it would have been serious.”

“Ahh, is that so… I have that book to thank for that.”

“That’s right.”

Bastian checked his abdomen, apart from the white cloth wrapped around him, there was nothing else.

“Huh!? Where’s my book!? My future masterpiece!”

“If, if you mean that…”

Elise looked towards somewhere.

Besides the chair on the bed was a book— Or something that should be a book.

Most of the pages were falling off and the pages were warped. It had been pierced by some kind of blade, crumbled after soaking in water and were dyed with blood.

Bastian's mouth was trembling.

"Aw-awesome! Doesn't it look cursed!? Isn't that cool!?"

"Your personality is hopeless."

"Ahh, but it really is cool! Ah, but what do you think?"

"… Yes… It is completely drenched, half the pages had been smeared, it can't even be called a book anymore."

"That's true."

Since he jumped into the river, it couldn't be helped if the book became like this.

Elise lowered her head.

"Sorry… It is my fault…"

"It's just some water, it's fine."

"But…"

"I'm still alive— Which means my masterpiece can just be written again. I thought of some new ideas, so I will definitely write a better book!"

Yosh! Bastian shouted spiritedly.

Elise was teary eyed.

"When you are done, please… Let me read it…"

"Yeah!"

"No matter how boring it is."

"Don't say that while crying! I don't want it to be bad and boring!? Do you have to put it that way!?"

"You two are so close. I recalled that she is your fiancee?"

"…!?"

Bastian didn't think and looked at Elise immediately.

After looking surprised, Elise turned her face away.

He could tell her face was blushing, even her ears was red.

— Don't say it if you will get embarrassed!

However, this setting was more acceptable to explain her traveling with a Belgarian noble.

That was what she told the bearded driver back then.

Shia said this place was related to both Belgaria and High Britannia.

“Tiraso Laverde house’s main family is a noble of Belgaria. However, they were originally from a small nation to the south, and their property might get confiscated is a war breaks out. Despite that, they set up a branch family here in High Brittania fifty years ago.”

“Hmmm, that means the main family is in Belgaria, the branch family is in High Brittania?”

“It is as you said, they are involved in business with these two nations, and right now was a great chance to do business, that’s what the master said.”

“Ahh, I have yet to greet your master yet.”

“You can’t get up yet. I will do the greeting, Bastian you just rest here and recuperate.”

“Is that so? Well, okay.”

Greeting them while drenched in blood will earn their ire anyway.

Shia stood up.

“Seeing that you are so energetic, you can eat right? The doctor said that if you are able to, you should eat more. Shall I bring something for you?”

“Thanks, that will be a great help.”

“My pleasure.”

With that, Shia left the room.

This should be the Tiraso Laverde family mansion. The footsteps in the corridor grew further away. Bastian clenched his fist.

“Sorry, Elise.”

“There is nothing to apologize for, Bastian.”

“But! What day is it!? Where is this place!?”

“Today is the 24th, this is the mansion of Tiraso Laverde family, located in hill Smiles, which is to the south of Gray Bridge.”

“… I was out for so long.”

“It is a miracle you survived despite those heavy wounds. You should be aching all over right now.”

“This is nothing.”

“If your wounds will heal, anything else doesn’t matter.”

Elise was gentle.

Why couldn’t he fulfill her dreams?

Bastian suffered the first setback since his birth. He failed and was useless.

"… I should had… escorted you… to the royal capital."

"It can't be helped."

"But, you worked so hard!"

"We failed because I suggested we go to Gray Bridge, I should say that about you, Bastian… You worked so hard to help me… The knights too…"

Elise's voice was trembling.

Her tears were falling.

"I-I… I was… asked by her majesty… I even lost that ring…"

"I!"

"Woooo… I… did my best… I did my best… Ahhh… Nothing! I didn't do anything ahhhh!!"

Bastian embraced Elise.

And Elise embraced Bastian.

The two of them embraced each other helplessly, and cried like children.

"Sorry Elise…"

"Wahhh… No… it's… me…. Wahhh…"

"It's because… I lost to him…"

— What if he had won against Oswald during the duel?

What if he understood the situation in High Britannia better?

What if, he did more research before going to Gray Bridge?

His sense of regret kept welling up.

Elise was also blaming herself.

She had only one wish, but she let a lot of people down and lost so many things—

Both of them failed.

* * *

After Elise finally calmed down, the door was knocked.

"Shia here."

Was she waiting along the corridor all this while?

Bastian wiped away his tears and did his best to speak in a calm voice:

"… Please, please come in."

Shia came in while holding a tray.

A saltish fragrance filled the room.

“Mr. Bastian, I brought you some stewed chicken and jacket potatoes, please enjoy yourself. Ah, Elise’s share is here too.”

“… Thank… Thank you.”

“Don’t mention it, please cheer up.”

On the tray was a newspaper.

Bastian picked it up.

“This is?”

“Ah, you slept for four days, so you probably wanted to read this, that’s what master said.”

“Is that so. Thanks.”

He could imagine the news on it was not something he would be happy to learn. Even so, he had to confirm it.

Elise leaned in with her shoulder.

Bastian opened the newspaper and they read it together.

“The coronation of the new Queen, Margaret Steelart!”

Steelart year 42, April 23th.

The senator announced during the ‘Dawn of Declaration’ the coronation of Her Majesty Margaret Steelart!

In Her Majesty’s speech, she said: “For the sake of the nation’s stability and prosperity, I promise to focus on foreign diplomatic affairs.”

Bastian did not release the newspaper even after he read it.

He still couldn’t accept this fact.

Footsteps could be heard approaching.

Without even knocking, a maid opened the door forcefully.

“Shia, bad news!”

“What is the matter!?”

“It’s war! Look, the men are all moving.”

When she heard that, Shia opened the windows.

Outside the window was a large courtyard.

Everyone from butlers, gardeners and labourers were all gathered and bustling. Everyone was holding a thin piece of news.

“It’s war! War is breaking out!”

“Ahh, finally, we had declared war on the Belgarian Empire!”

“War is coming!”

* * *

Steelart year 42, April 23rd.

High Britannia declared war against the Belgarian Empire.

On the same morning, they opened fire on the harbour of Siennebourg, situated in the Trouin Duchy.

In response, the Belgarian Empire deployed the 2nd Army to intercept.

The first ground battle between the two nations, ‘the battle of Siennebourg, showed the world the power of the new model rifles and cannons of High Britannia.

The battle between High Britannia and the Belgarian Empire escalated into an all out war.

アニティーナ第4巻目
発売おめでとうございます&
お買い上げありがとうございます!!

今日の
エリーゼ
ちゃん

今回は
新キャラがいっぱいで
とても新鮮でした。

むらさきさん、担当の和田さん
大変おつかれさまでした。
今回もすごく楽しませていただいて
ありがとうございました。

Chimeru